

Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

What an odd year! I hope that all our readers and their families are keeping safe and well during these extraordinary times. I never anticipated that I would be compiling this issue while still working from home, having only made it in to the BTO Scotland office twice since returning from maternity leave in early March.

In August SRMG (Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group - the steering group which oversees the work of the Scheme) met virtually to discuss the future of the SRMS and ongoing work and this issue brings you up to speed with the latest SRMS developments. In this issue we celebrate the 40th year of the Scottish Raptor Study Group with an article written by Chris Rollie (Chair of the D&G branch of SRSG), and have an interesting article from Davie Black of Mountaineering Scotland in relation to rock climbing and crag-nesting raptors.

While lockdown will have been frustrating for many of our data contributors in terms of being able to crack on with their usual raptor monitoring fieldwork, it may also have given some a greater awareness and appreciation for what is on their doorstep. I was delighted to discover a Tawny Owl brood within 200 m of my front door, which I got to enjoy over several weeks on my daily dog walk. I have invited raptor workers to share their own lockdown raptor delights, which you can read about in this issue.



Amy (SRMC)

SRMS data submissions for the 2020 breeding season

While the overall picture of the 2020 breeding season will be reduced compared to a 'normal' year, as monitoring is a long-term project and can cope with short-term data gaps. Some contributors may well have taken up monitoring again following the Scottish Government advice updated on 28th May which allowed fieldwork to recommence provided relevant Covid-19 advice from the Government was adhered to. The SRMS would be very pleased to receive any data that raptor workers have been able to collect for 2020, in line with our usual deadlines. Remember that it is helpful to tell us when regular sites that you monitor are not checked.

Please submit your 2020 records to the SRMS by 31st October 2020.

SRMS Annual reporting



Please keep an eye out for our SRMS annual report, reporting on the 2019 breeding season, which will be published shortly.

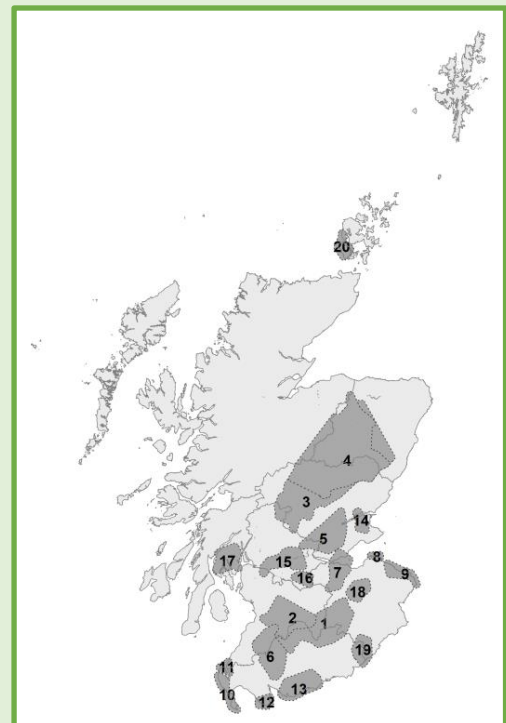
We are already thinking ahead to our next edition, where we plan to publish finalised local study area trends for all SRMS species (read more about the next steps with this work below) in addition to regional and national trends where these are possible.

If you have any photos from your 2020 monitoring season which you would be happy to share for potential inclusion in the annual report (or for use in other SRMS products such as these newsletter, the SRMS website and presentations about the SRMS and our work) please do send them in.

Work on producing local trends

One of the main areas of SRMS work is to produce trends in breeding numbers (e.g. proportion of home ranges occupied by pairs & number of breeding pairs) and productivity (e.g. proportion of breeding pairs successfully fledging at least one offspring & mean number of young fledged per successful pair) for as many long-term studies as possible. We can only produce robust trends, however, by taking into account any changes in survey effort or coverage that may have occurred through time. In order to be able to produce trends in numbers of breeding pairs in a particular geographical area, coverage needs to be as comprehensive as possible (most or all breeding pairs detected) and consistent across years.

Areas corresponding to the clusters of home ranges from which sufficient data were reported to estimate population trends for Peregrine between 2003 and 2018 (1 – 16) or between 2009 and 2018 (17 – 20).



We have now been able to produce draft trends from the data submitted to the SRMS since 2003 (and up to 2018). We have identified 'clusters' (groups of territories in a more or less contiguous geographical area) across Scotland where the coverage has been considered high enough to calculate trends for at least 10 years up to 2018. We have also identified a number of other clusters that currently offer high potential for future trends analysis provided that the level of monitoring continues to remain at least as high as between 2014 and 2018. The picture included here shows the clusters that have been identified for Peregrine, as an example.

Over the next couple of months we will be consulting data contributors within SRSB branches to help to sense check the trends we have been able to produce based on their local knowledge. Among the aspects of the trend we are asking data contributors to check are:

- If we have produced trends for areas and species with which you are familiar, do these concur with your own understanding of any changes in numbers or productivity that have been taking place over the years in questions?
- If you have any concerns about the trends produced, are these related to known variations over the years in survey coverage/effort? For which areas?
- Are you aware of any areas of consistently good coverage for which it might be possible to produce trends that we haven't included here?

If you are a member of a SRSB and have been operating a long-term study for which you think it might be possible to produce trends please keep an eye out for the consultation documents from your SRSB branch chair or relevant species coordinator. We are grateful for all the help you are able to provide to enable us to ensure that the trends we publish are as robust as possible.

Research on Golden Eagle roosting behaviour

A paper has recently been published investigating the roosting behaviour of Golden Eagles based on satellite telemetry. This work showed that Golden Eagles use more roosts than expected from previous field-based studies and that Golden Eagles appear to select more sheltered, multi-use roost sites during strong winds. To read more about this study, please see Andrew Ford, John Taylor & David C. Jardine (2019) Observations on the roosting behaviour of adult male Golden Eagles from satellite telemetry, Ringing & Migration, 34:1, 38-44, [DOI: 10.1080/03078698.2019.1768662](https://doi.org/10.1080/03078698.2019.1768662).

Forty years of raptor study groups in Scotland

This year, 2020, is the 40th anniversary of organised, voluntary, annual raptor study group work in Scotland.



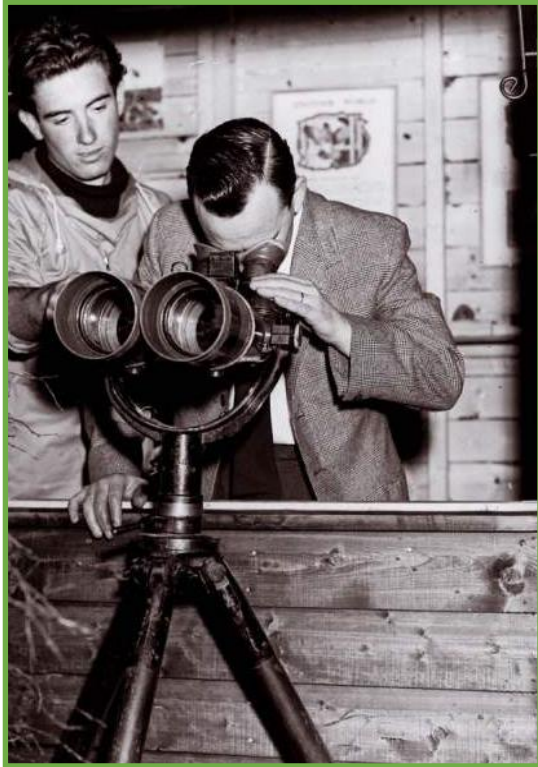
Patrick Stirling-Aird (Secretary) cutting a celebratory cake at the 2020 SRSG Conference with guest speaker Dr María del Mar Delgado (left) and SRSG Chair (Feb 2019 – Feb2020) and conference host Claire Smith (right). (Photo: Logan Steele).

Although there had been earlier regional and even national raptor surveys, for example the celebrated (BTO) Peregrine Enquiry led by Derek Ratcliffe in 1961-62, and Ian Newton's Sparrowhawk work in Eskdale in the 1970s, it is generally held that the first of the modern Scottish raptor study groups became established in 1980, when first Highland and then Northeast Scotland organised meetings. However, in researching for a short celebratory talk on this subject at the 2020 Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSG) conference, it quickly became clear to me that, in addition to a handful of renowned field ornithologists who undertook very detailed and often solo studies of raptors in the early years, most areas of Scotland had seen at least some co-ordinated raptor study efforts long before 1980.



Mick Marquiss, Stuart Rae, Miss Therese and Adam Watson with a dead pigeon in the Cairngorms, 1981. (Photo: Keith Brockie).

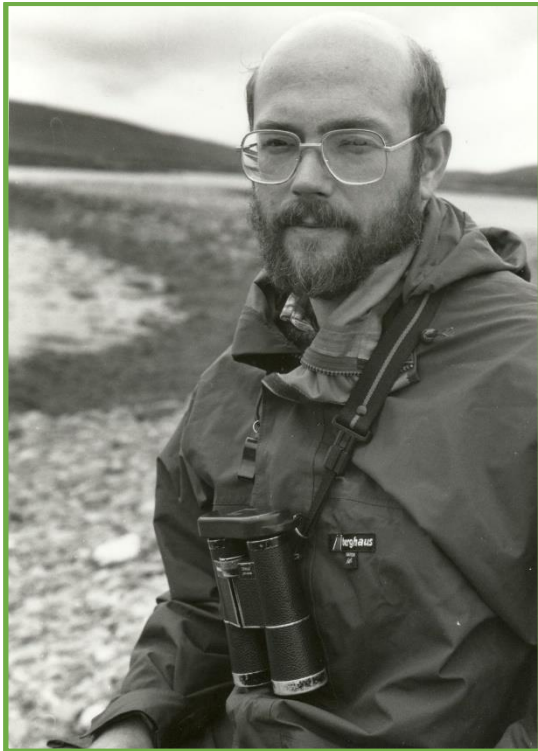
Perhaps the most well-known of the pioneers and certainly the most published was Seton Gordon, who enjoyed a wide range of upland interests and connections, but whose early 20th century work on Golden Eagles in Highland and Northeast regions was an inspiration to many, including Adam Watson, who began his own Golden Eagle work in the Cairngorms in the 1940s. Momentous and at once colourful yet shadowy solo fieldwork work by Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, was paralleled and continued by George Waterston, Philip Brown, Roy Dennis and many others in the brilliant protection and promotion of the Speyside Ospreys as they re-established themselves as regular and successful breeders from the late 1950s.



Roy Dennis (on left) – he and Adam Watson conceived a national SRSG organisation. (Photo: RSPB).

The concept of regional raptor study groups had been discussed by Roy Dennis, Adam Watson and one or two others for some years, but Roy organised the first informal Highland raptor study group meeting in 1980, including Colin Crooke, Brian Etheridge, Malcolm Harvey, Bob Swann, Dave Whitaker and Jeff Watson. Within the year Adam formed the Northeast group with Skitts (Rab Rae), Ed Duthie and John Chapman, but which initially also included east Perthshire and Angus workers such as Mike Nicoll, Adam Ritchie, Alec Rollo and Keith Brockie. However, in considering all the people involved in the flurry of practical organizational work by raptor workers in the early 80s, two individuals are outstanding, namely Pete Ellis and Dave Dick of the RSPB, and indeed each credits the other's vital importance in the formation of SRSG. It is fair to say that the raptor study group movement throughout the UK and Ireland is to some degree founded on their respective skills, energy, knowledge and enthusiasm.

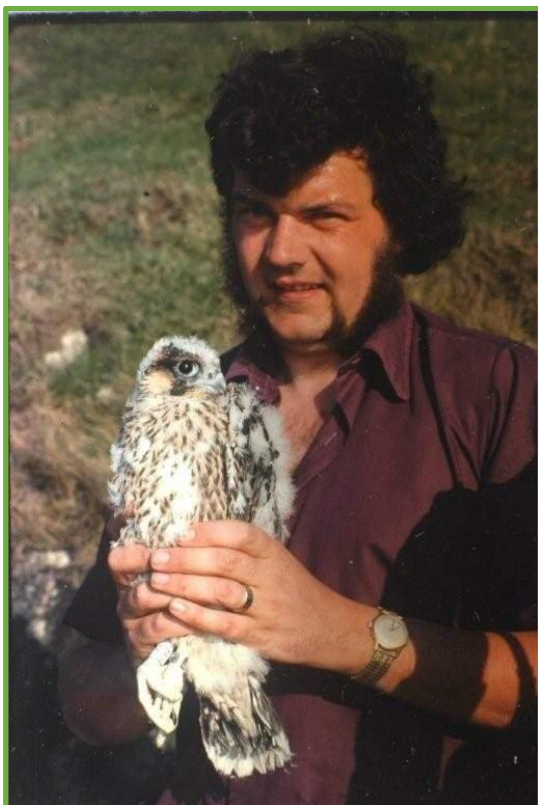
1983 saw the formation of new groups in Lothian & Borders, Central Scotland and the Southwest. In the former George Carse had been involved with Peregrines since the 1960s, but 1983 brought him together with Dave Dick, Chris Badenoch, Andrew Panter, Chris Cameron and Alan Forrest, with current Chair Alan Heavisides joining them in 1984 when species co-ordinators were also appointed. Pat Sandeman began his annual surveys of Golden Eagles in Perthshire in the early 1950s, and reintroduced three White-tailed Eagles from Norway to the Argyll coast in 1959. John Mitchell initiated Peregrine and Raven work in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs at the suggestion of Derek Ratcliffe in the mid-60s, with input across a wider area from Don & Bridget MacAskill (1970s) and Patrick Stirling-Aird. So, by 1983 when the Central Scotland group first met, there was already significant annual Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Raven monitoring underway. Pete Ellis was instrumental in establishing this group, which incorporated Perth & Kinross west of the A9. Finally, in 1983, there was the first meeting of the Southwest group, which met at Peregrine man Dick Roxburgh's house in Catrine, Ayrshire. Both Pete Ellis and Dave Dick attended, as did Donald Watson, Geoff Shaw and a group largely drawn from Peregrine protection work in the early 1970s, including Richard Mearns, Ian Hopkins, Charlie Park, Richard Gladwell and Gordon Riddle, who was soon to become chair and who is now the longest serving chair in Scotland.



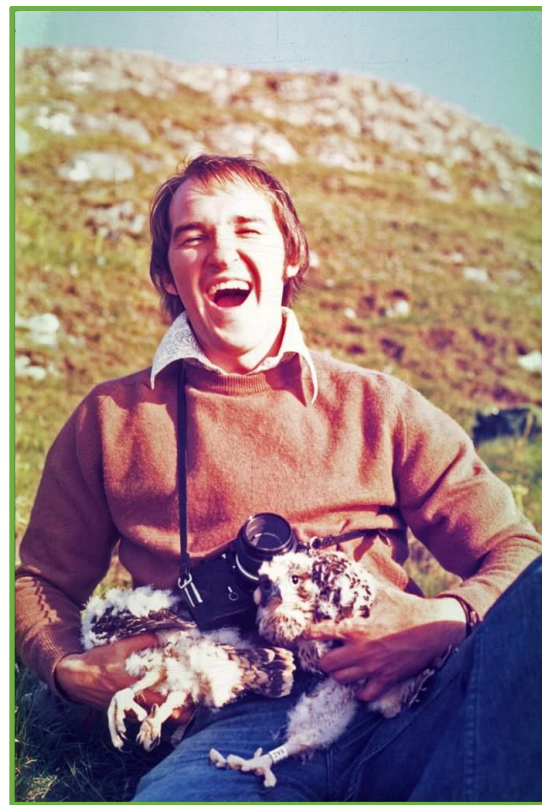
Pete Ellis (Photo: Pete Ellis)



Dave Dick (Photo: Andy Stronach)



Angus Hogg (Photo: Richard Mearns)



Gordon Riddle (Photo: Richard Mearns)



Dick Roxburgh and Chris Rollie after peregrines in 1991. (Photo: Daily Record).



Derek Ratcliffe, Donald Watson and Dick Roxburgh at a raven site in Galloway in early 1990s. (Photo: Chris Rollie).

Such was the growth of raptor work in the southwest that in 1990 the group separated into South Strathclyde and Dumfries & Galloway raptor groups, with me becoming chair of the latter. The following year, with the support of Dave Dick, Tayside Raptor Study Group was formed in a coalescence of members from Perth & Kinross (formerly of Central RSG) and Angus (formerly of the Northeast group), with Keith Brockie as co-ordinator (and later chair).



Raptor enthusiasts on the various Scottish island groups were watching with interest and in 1987 Dave Dick convened the first meeting of the Uists group, which included Bill Neill, Tim Dix and Paul Boyer. Of all Scottish raptor study group areas, the Uists must have seen the largest percentage growth in breeding species, with new additions since then being White-tailed Eagle, Sparrowhawk and Long-eared Owl. In Argyll Sandy Gordon and Mike Gregory had been monitoring Golden Eagles continuously since the 1960s, with 1980s work on the species involving Justin Grant, Mike McGrady and Dave Anderson, and on Hen Harriers by Mike Madders and later Paul Haworth. However, it wasn't until 1993 that the Argyll group was formally constituted, with Roger Broad becoming the first species-co-ordinator.

The young FES team in Argyll. (Photo: David Jardine)



Roger Broad with FES Rangers Donnie and Alistair at an Osprey site in Argyll (Photo: FLS).

In Orkney Eddie Balfour undertook an intensive and ground-breaking study of Hen Harriers from the 1940s until 1974, assisted by Jim Williams from the early 1960s. This was continued by Nick Picozzi from 1974 to 1981, and subsequently by a group led by Eric Meek, including both Jim and Stuart Williams. Stuart continues co-ordination of this long-running monitoring to this day. Over the years additional species were monitored and Keith Fairclough and Brian Ribbands joined in helping to establish an informal, but active Orkney group, from 1999, but which didn't become fully constituted and join the SRSB fold until 2004, when Keith became chair.



Paul Haworth at a Golden Eagle's ground nest on Lewis (Photo: Robin Reid).

On Lewis & Harris prior to the 1990s virtually all raptor survey work was undertaken by RSPB during national surveys, and included Golden Eagle work by Dave Dick, Dave Walker and Alison Rothwell. From the early 1990s Paul Haworth expanded monitoring to several other species and from 2002 he also inspired and collaborated with Robin Reid, who established the raptor study group in 2008 with help from Paul and a few other enthusiasts and visiting consultants.

Last and in some ways least is Zetland Raptor Study Group. Never the most noted place in the British Isles for breeding raptors, from 1967 into the early 1970s Fetlar gained national publicity and attention through the breeding of Snowy Owls, as monitored, reported and celebrated by Bobby Tulloch. Although several species can occur on migration, Merlin has been the only regular breeding raptor, with Peregrines now and then, and of course there are some 200 pairs of Ravens. Nonetheless, and rather fittingly, Pete Ellis established the group in 2014, becoming its first chair.

Collaboration and summary of SRSR achievements

Inevitably and constructively, SRSR has always enjoyed a close relationship with RSPB, particularly with their investigations department in respect of persecution, and with their conservation scientists regarding national surveys of Golden Eagles, Merlins and Hen Harriers. In the early 1980s, Schedule 1 species disturbance licences were issued and returns collated by the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), and Colin Tubbs in Hampshire maintained a Raptor & Owl Research Register of records submitted by various individuals and groups as they became established. From 1984 the RSPB collated an annual Raptor Roundup from data supplied by species co-ordinators. In the early 1990s this was collated and edited by Keith Morton and published by the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) with funding support from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH, now NatureScot). In 2002 the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS), a partnership involving SRSR, RSPB, SOC, BTO, Forestry Commission Scotland (now Forestry & Land Scotland), SNH, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, became established, with Brian Etheridge appointed as Scottish Raptor Monitoring Officer (SRMO) the following year.



Brian Etheridge, SRMO 2003-13. (Photo: X)

This recording and collation of robust data on breeding raptors by SRSR, and collaborative work with key partners, has been the cornerstone of raptor conservation in Scotland over the past four decades, and in conclusion, I set out below a list of some achievements and milestones that I believe help to illustrate this.

- Reporting incidents of wildlife crime to the police and RSPB investigations department since 1980.
- Critical role in national surveys of Peregrine, Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier and Merlin.
- Involvement in the successful reintroduction and establishment of both Red Kites and White-tailed Eagles as widespread and regular breeding species in Scotland.
- 1991 – First national SRSR Conference in Perth, and annually since.
- Key role in the designation of Special Protection Areas for Hen Harrier, Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin and Osprey.
- 2000 – Publication of the UK Raptor Working Group Report (DETR/JNCC).
- Establishment of SRMS (2002) and appointment of SRMO (2003).
- 2005 - Creation of SRSR Web Site.
- 2006 – Establishment of annual Derek Ratcliffe Memorial Lecture; 2007 – establishment of the annual Donald & Jeff Watson Raptor Award in collaboration with the Watson family (first award presented to Adam Watson in 2009).

- Providing key information for the Golden Eagle Framework Report (SNH, 2008) and the Hen Harrier Framework Report (JNCC, 2011).
- 2009 – Hosted the Raptor Research Foundation Conference in Pitlochry; the first time this international conference had been held outside North America.
- Involvement in reintroduction of Ospreys and White-tailed Eagles to England, and Ospreys to Spain.
- Organization of and involvement in Hen Harrier Awareness Events, Scottish Parliamentary Receptions, Wildlife Crime Police training events etc.

The origins of the raptor group movement stemmed not only from the love, passion and enthusiasm of its members, but also from the need, sometimes urgent, to gather robust information on the numbers, distribution and breeding success of Scotland's raptors. From the organochlorine-induced population crashes of the late 1950s and 60s, through egg and chick thefts by collectors and falconers of the late 20th century, to the historical and sadly still on-going persecution by some game-shooting interests, information on raptors has been important to the authorities and thereby to the people of, and visitors to, Scotland, in attempting to ensure that raptors maintain and improve their status in the ecosystem and as treasured icons of our natural heritage.

In this regard it is unquestionable that the work of Scottish raptor study groups has been and continues to be fundamental to the conservation and promotion of Scotland's raptors, and an inspiration to raptor enthusiasts elsewhere in the UK and abroad.

Acknowledgements

This article owes a lot to many people in and around SRSG for provision of information, clarification and advice. In this regard many thanks are due to the Chairs of SRSG: Paul Boyer, Keith Duncan, Pete Ellis, David Jardine, Alan Heavisides, Duncan Orr-Ewing, Robin Reid, Gordon Riddle, Kelvin Thomson, Ewan Weston, Stuart Williams. Thanks also to Keith Brockie, Dave Dick, Claire Smith, Wendy Mattingley, Keith Morton, Rab Rae, Logan Steel, Brian Etheridge and Patrick Stirling-Aird. Thanks also to photographers for permission to use the images (see photo credits).

Chris Rollie (Chair, Dumfries & Galloway RSG)

Modern Conservation: Critical Lessons from Birds of Prey

We have begun work to produce a 'Special Topic' issue of the journal *Frontiers* (<https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/12978/modern-conservation-critical-lessons-from-birds-of-prey>) on raptor conservation. This is attracting a great deal of interest, and so far we have received a lot of excellent proposed contributions. More on this anon, but excellent to see so much of the cutting edge science and technological work on raptors coming to the fore.

Miguel Ferrer, Ian Newton, Des Thompson, Keith Bildstein and Virginia Morandini

SRMS Online

SRMS Online has been up and running since March and this year and we have been pleased to see that there have been a small number of regular users inputting their data for the 2020 breeding season. We are hoping that next breeding season more people will start to use SRMS Online.

The screenshot shows the SRMS Online web application. The header includes the title 'Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme' and a navigation bar with links: Home, Visit Data, Locations, My Contributors, Help, and a Logout button. Below the header, the page is titled 'Location Management'. On the left, there is a sidebar with 'Location Tools' (Map View, List View, Select, Multi-Select), 'Display' options (Site Labels, Existing Sites, Measurements, Bing Aerial Map), and a 'Filter by Species' dropdown. The main area displays a map of Scotland with various locations marked. At the bottom, there are logos for JNCC, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry, BTO, SRSG, RSPB, and RBBP.

How do I get started using SRMS Online?

You need to have a MyBTO login in order to login to SRMS Online. If you **already have a MyBTO login**, please drop the SRMC an email to let her know your MyBTO username and she can then proceed to set up your account for you, including pre-loading any locations which you regularly monitor. If you **do not already have a MyBTO login**, please pop along to <https://www.bto.org/my-bto> to set up an account then drop the SRMC an email to let her know the BTO username you created. This will then allow her to complete setting up your account for you, including pre-loading any locations which you regularly monitor.

How do I access SRMS Online?

Once you have an SRMS Online account activated (the SRMC will alert you when this has happened) you will be able to access SRMS Online via the following link:

<https://app.bto.org/demography/srms/public/login.jsp>

Please note that SRMS Online will not appear in the list of surveys you have access to on MyBTO.

Is training available?

Yes! We hope that an increasing number of people start using SRMS Online in earnest next breeding season, and with that in mind we are hoping to be able to run some training events over the Autumn/Winter and into next Spring. Obviously, Covid-19 has been (and may continue to be) a bit of a limiting factor in terms of organising face-to-face training but we are keen to organise online training for individuals and small groups that are happy to give that a try.

If you are interested in receiving virtual training in SRMS Online this coming Autumn/Winter then please email the SRMC and let her know whether you have a preference for attending (a) weekday event during normal working hours, (b) weekday evening event or (c) weekend event and whether you have a preference for (a) 1:1 training or (b) small group training.

SRMS Online materials, including a Quickstart guide and Guidance Manual are also now available through the "SRMS Online" menu on the SRMS website. We are also hoping to release a series of demo videos over the next few months as an additional or alternative way that you can get to grips with SRMS Online in your own time. Please keep an eye out for these on the SRMS website.

Have you registered as an SRMS data contributor?

If you are a current (or former) SRMS data contributor it is important that you complete and return a SRMS Registration Form to the SRMS.

The purpose of the Registration form is for you to provide the SRMS:

- Personal data (e.g. name and contact information) that you are comfortable sharing with us and to let us know the purposes for which the SRMS can use this information. Please note the SRMS now has a Privacy Statement (see <http://raptormonitoring.org/srms-data/privacy-statement>).
- Your intentions with regards to using SRMS Online to submit your data to the SRMS in the future and granting us permission to help set you up.
- To get your consent for the SRMS to use and share your data in the ways specified in the Data Sharing & Use Policy (see <http://raptormonitoring.org/srms-data/data-sharing-use-policy>). We hope that if you contribute data to the SRMS you will give your consent for the SRMS to use and share your data in the ways specified in our Data Sharing & Use Policy. **Unless you have given us permission to use your data, it cannot be used in SRMS products such as the SRMS annual report.**

Registration Forms can be downloaded from the SRMS website at <http://raptormonitoring.org/getting-involved/registering-for-srms>.

Ideally, the form would be completed electronically and emailed to srmc@bto.org otherwise it can be printed off and posted.

If you usually contribute data to the Scheme but have not yet completed a SRMS Registration Form, please do so at your earliest opportunity and return it to the SRMC.

Updates to the SRMS Data Sharing & Use Policy

In August the SRMS Data Sharing & Use Policy was updated to reflect (i) changes in the names of FCS & FES, (ii) changes in gatekeepers for both RSPB & RBBP, (iii) the existence of the SRMS Legacy Data Portal to share data with partners and (iv) the existence of SRMS Online to capture data. In September the Policy was further updated to reflect the new operating name of SNH, NatureScot from 24th August

The Policy can be found on the SRMS website:

<http://raptormonitoring.org/srms-data/data-sharing-use-policy>

Raptor and ecosystem health tool and a big thank you

We made this possible. Gaby is now Dr. Peniche, but most importantly, we have developed a suite of tools to help us evaluate raptor health and continue to help raptor conservation. Our work has shown how the health of raptor populations can be used to assess aspects of the health of the wider environment such as the levels of mercury or rodenticide across the landscape. From here, we hope the monitoring will continue to provide insights both for raptors and the wider environment. Thank you all so much. You are a part of this work. Firstly, it all started with your belief in the crazy ideas that 'The Mexican' proposed to you; "May I follow you around the Scottish hills?" or "would you mind picking up and sending me any smelly raptor bodies that you may find?" Somehow, I managed to convince you all.

In the field, you shared your expertise, taught me about raptors, geology, environment, beagán de Gàidhlig, provided me with all sorts of smelly samples and fed me. Many of you even offered me the most valuable thing, your friendship. However, you also showed me the incredible work unsung heroes do for our natural world. Good boots, a cupa tì, and a climbing rope. No fame, no recognition sought, just the desire to help... and you make such a huge and unfairly unrecognised change. Some deserve special thanks; to you and your partners and friends who spoiled me rotten with your hospitality: Jon and Heather B., Robin R., Justin and Margaret G., Lewis and Rachel P., Ewan and Jenny W., Stuart, Graham A., Keith B, David A. and his team, Malcom H., Adam R – Thank you!

To Patrick Stirling-Aird, Nina S. and Amy C., Cat B., Roy Dennis and the rest of the SRSB members and raptor experts, who I rudely forgot to mention here, thank you for sharing your expertise, ideas, support, help and guidance in different aspects of this project.

The results or the work will all be disseminated in due course, but for now I simply wanted the opportunity to express my gratitude.

Dr Gabriela Peniche (University of Edinburgh)

Lockdown raptor delights

Unfortunately the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic meant that raptor fieldworkers were not able to undertake fieldwork in the early part of the breeding season. We thought we would ask our contributors to share any interesting raptor highlights they may have experienced during lockdown, from their gardens on in going about their day-to-day lives. This is what they came back with.....



"Unfortunately whilst we were not able to access many of the known Barn Owl sites this year due to lockdown, on my evening walk I came across a new family of Barn Owls who had decided to isolate in a hollow Ash tree".

Alan Lillie (Dumfries & Galloway RSG)

"I had two amazing experiences with the same female Sparrowhawk which decided to kill and pluck two unfortunate pigeons at the front of our house in Dalkeith. These occurred four months apart - the first just before lockdown had officially started on 6th March and the second on 19th July.



The latter was literally on our front doormat, and the other 5 metres away further along the front of our house. Although we've had piles of plucked feathers over the years and I witnessed a Sparrowhawk take a siskin during a Big Garden Birdwatch years ago, this was the first time I've seen the plucking underway. I was able to take endless photos without disturbing the bird!"

Ian Poxton (Lothian & Borders RSG)



"Mid-afternoon on 31st May, found me planting beans in the vegetable garden at home, as you do when deep under lockdown, with no prospect of doing any raptor work in the near future. Straightening up, I leaned against an old plastic compost bin and got one hell of a shock when a Tawny Owl erupted in a confusion of feathers, from right under my feet. Evidently, she had been sitting there all the time I had been busy with the seeds and, sure enough, there was a very white, fresh-looking egg.

This was an unusual Tawny nest site on several counts: in a working garden, just 15m from my house, in a part-filled compost bin and very late in the season. Besides which, I'd never had Tawnies breeding on the premises in 40 years. I was concerned that she would desert, considering the sudden flushing, when she was at least as shocked as me - but on the contrary she returned and laid two more eggs. We could hardly abandon the vegetables and despite being sensitive to the nest, we sometimes caused her to leave the eggs, but she always came back, and by hatching she usually stayed put and turned her head away from the disturbance. Two chicks were reared and fledged in mid-July - fully two months later than most of the local Tawnies - and one of the young birds made it into the steading where it could be heard calling for food for a couple more weeks. There is a school of thought which holds that if you sit down and wait, the birds will come to you (q.v. lockdown)".

Geoff Shaw (Dumfries & Galloway RSG)

"This season, Red Kites nested successfully in Daviot, just south of Inverness. This is probably the first time they have bred here in over 130 years. Kites have been seen in the area regularly over the last decade and more, but breeding activity has never been recorded. Daviot is adjacent to a vast landscape of intensive grouse moor and persecution of raptors is widespread and ongoing - even within publicly-owned forests.



Kites dispersing into this area from the Black Isle and elsewhere forage on the moors - with inevitable consequences - and this is almost certainly why kites have taken so long to re-establish in Daviot as a breeding species. Recently, however, the habitat in Daviot has changed slightly. Within a mile of this new nest, large areas of mature plantation were clear felled about two years ago and the rest of the area is upland farmland that has sheep on it once more, due to a new tenancy. Consequently, the kites have been able to find sufficient food locally and have not foraged on the grouse moors.

The female kite was tagged. She was two years old and came from a nest on the north-west shore of the Beauly Firth - a natal dispersal distance of about 20 km. This was probably her first breeding attempt, which may explain why it was exceptionally late; the latest ever recorded by Brian Etheridge in his long study of kites around Inverness. Her inexperience may also explain why the nest, which was in a tall Scots pine, was slanting and very precarious. Eventually, it blew out and the chicks were found on the ground on the 2nd of August. They had been on the ground for up to seven days and they had walked about 40 m uphill. The ground around the chicks was strewn with prey remains, which confirmed that the adults had continued to provision the chicks.



"Given there are a few foxes and martens in the area, Brian came across on the 3rd of August and constructed a temporary nest platform into which the chicks were placed. The adults were seen to continue to feed the two young in the nest platform for six days, before they started flying around the woods. This episode highlights the importance of late visits to nests to confirm outcomes - and to avert disasters!"

Kenny Kortland (HRSRG) & Brian Etheridge (HRSRG)

Rock climbing & crag-nesting raptors

The interests of rock climbing and of wildlife conservation usually meet on ledges with wild plants and lichens, and with birds roosting or nesting. How climbers can avoid meeting birds with special protection, and even those that don't have that special status, may be of interest to readers of this newsletter.

Climbers have a keen interest in their sport – a test of their skill on difficult terrain, with cracks and ledges providing a temporary rest on the ascent. These cracks and ledges are also home to wild plants and birds. It is clear that here there is the potential for tension where both interests meet.

There are hundreds or thousands of rocky outcrops across the country. Not all are attractive or good for climbing, but there is plenty space in Scotland for both climbers and crag-nesting birds to do what they do. Birds and climbers generally coexist without detriment to the birds' breeding success. The focus is therefore on those specific outcrops that are occupied by nesting birds and that also provide the good climbing that climbers seek.

Some years ago, Mountaineering Scotland (or Mountaineering Council of Scotland as it was then) acknowledged that some climbing routes where there are nesting birds may create potential conflicts between recreational access and conservation needs. Without care, climbers may inadvertently contravene parts of the law, particularly regarding rarer birds which benefit from special protection.

This acknowledgment led to producing advice to inform the climbing community of the issue and what individuals can do to minimise disturbance, and thereby assisting breeding success. The current advice is on the Mountaineering Scotland website: <https://www.mountaineering.scot/access/birds-and-nesting/disturbance> which includes a pdf with more detail to download.

Specially protected birds, those on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 posed a more specific challenge. Firstly because of the rarity and vulnerability regarding breeding success, and secondly the legal implication of reckless disturbance and what that means.

There was, and still is, a need for climbers to know where there was the potential to put themselves and the protected bird species at risk. Not necessarily being experienced birdwatchers, the identification of which birds were specially protected and which had the general protection could be difficult, and I offer the example of the 'Tourist Eagle' otherwise known as *Buteo buteo*!!

Obviously, there is sensitivity around nest locations, but climbers will climb unless they are provided with the knowledge to avoid those sensitive locations. In 2013/14 MCoFS produced an online crag alert system in conjunction with raptor study groups and local Ranger services.

This system was an attempt to inform and advise the climbing community of sensitive locations where disturbance of specially protected nesting birds may occur, and agreeing voluntary climbing restrictions during the critical times of the breeding cycle. A key aspect of this was to provide as close to real-time information as possible on sensitive locations, to avoid disturbance and to indicate to climbers when it was ok to climb without potentially causing harm or breaking the law.

It is based on a 'traffic light' system of alerts to let climbers know if birds are prospecting a number of nest sites (amber); or nest building, incubating and feeding young (red); and when the young are fledged and can look after themselves, or if breeding failed and climbing will not cause problems (green). <https://www.mountaineering.scot/access/birds-and-nesting>

It is of course not perfect and the birds themselves complicate matters, with eagles being rather sensitive to movement within a fairly extensive range, while peregrines are often not alarmed about movements outside of a smaller sensitive zone around the nest.

The response of the birds depends on activity in line of sight, or if it lies beyond their sensitive zone. Peregrines are known in places to tolerate climbing where there is a buttress between the nest and climbing routes, or climbing takes place at the other end of an outcrop from where they usually nest.

This can result in discussion about the proportionate response in advising a restriction on climbing. For some locations the whole crag or outcrop may lie under the voluntary restriction as the climbs cannot not be done without causing alarm to the birds. At other locations certain climbing routes may be recommended to be avoided, while others may be climbed without alarming the nesting birds.

This voluntary system is based on self-regulation and is effective when it can be shown to demonstrate a 'least restrictive option' and evidence-based approach, which climbers trust to be fair and can buy into the agreed restrictions. They know where and when to avoid sensitive locations and understand that the request to avoid an area is proportionate to the situation.

It may be of interest to know that providing a restricted zone based on grid references doesn't work for climbers. Climbers base their route instruction on 'topos' – illustrations of the crag or outcrop, with routes indicated on the illustration and numbered and named for description in the text. So citing physical features of the rock as excluded or naming the restricted routes or sections is far more helpful to guide climbers.

The web alert system has developed year on year with volunteers, Countryside Rangers and Wardens contributing information on nesting and fledging dates leading to as accurate advice as can be given.

But there are two main challenges: firstly that not all climbers will look at the Mountaineering Scotland website for the information; secondly that its effectiveness is dependent on those monitoring nests to let us know if Schedule 1 birds (and others like Ravens too) are in occupation and when they vacate.

The first challenge depends on promotion of the service to the climbing community and the more that word gets around, the better. We do what we can but are happy to work with others to spread the word. This could, for example, involve notices at car parks near to known climbing/nest sites with a link or QR code for smartphones to take the climber to the webpage with the alert and the current status of the crag.

The second challenge is for SRMS. There is a fourth category in the alert system – the grey box that denotes a previously known nesting site, but no information received so far this year. Climbers are then advised to follow the general advice on the website and to proceed with caution.

The constraints of time on volunteers monitoring nests is well understood, but the more information we have, the better the service we can provide. So if you are monitoring a nest of a Schedule 1 bird where there are climbing routes, please do bear in mind this public service for climbers.

Additionally, I am interested in exploring opportunities to recruit potential volunteers from the climbing community to work with nest monitors. Birders know bird behaviour and climbers know where the routes lie.

Location sensitivity is an issue and training would be required, but extending the ability of nests to be kept under observation may be appealing, and a way of spreading word through the climbing community of the responsible approach to climbing in the breeding season.

So let's keep talking and looking at ways that we can improve the communications, so that one of the variables that can affect breeding success is minimised and climbers can continue to enjoy their activity responsibly.

I can be contacted on access@mountaineering.scot or 07555 769325

Mountaineering Scotland represents nearly 15,000 members and 162 mountaineering clubs in Scotland.

Davie Black (Access & Conservation Officer, Mountaineering Scotland)

Update on UN Convention on Migratory Species: Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia

The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa & Eurasia (Raptors MOU) aims to promote internationally coordinated actions to reverse population declines and improve the conservation status of migratory birds of prey throughout the African-Eurasian region. A lot of international collaborative work continues under the CMS Raptor MoU

(<https://www.cms.int/raptors/en>). The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) supporting a lot of this work is currently working through a number of actions.

The Strategic Implementation Plan (<https://www.cms.int/en/publication/vulture-msap-strategic-implementation-plan-report-implementation-date-cms-technical>) for the Vulture Multi-species Action Plan was published in February 2020 during the CMS COP13, and outlines a framework for implementation of key activities.

The Coordinating Unit of the Raptor MoU has been working with Sacha Dench, the CMS Ambassador for Avian Species (<https://www.cms.int/raptors/en/news/sacha-dench-appointed-cms-ambassador-cop13>) on developing a work programme and identifying opportunities for collaboration such as providing a statement for World Migratory Bird Day.

The first Review of the Raptors MOU Action Plan (<https://www.cms.int/raptors/en/document/first-review-raptors-mou-action-plan-april-2020>) was published in April 2020. This is a wholly comprehensive look at progress being made towards implementation of the Action Plan objectives, and proposes amendments to the current Action Plan and MoU text.

The Coordinating Unit supporting the MoU is currently working towards having the fourth meeting of the TAG in the autumns of 2021, and the Meeting of Signatories in spring 2022.

The Saker Falcon Task Force (<https://www.cms.int/raptors/en/meeting/5th-meeting-saker-falcon-task-force>) met in June 2020 and has agreed upon priorities for the next workplan period, including the formation of two discussion groups regarding electrocution and developing the Adaptive Management Framework.

We are adding some video clips to enliven the entries of the TAG members- Andre's (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEyaOn3QMqo&feature=youtu.be>) is a treat to watch!

Finally, the job vacancy for the Raptors Programme Officer has closed, and interviews will be underway in October. The aim will be to have someone appointed by April 2021.

Professor Des Thompson (Chair, Raptor MoU TAG)

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