

Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

Friday 24th June marks 20 years since the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme agreement was first signed at Atholl Palace, Pitlochry. In November 2022, we will be returning to Atholl Palace to mark this milestone with a celebratory event, to which SRMS supporters will be invited in due course.

I have been privileged to work for the SRMS for the last eight of those 20 years and while it has not always been the smoothest of journeys I believe we have made some useful steps forward over that time. Since I came into post we have developed Data Sharing & Use Policy ensuring that SRMS data can be used and shared effectively, we have developed an online data entry system to ensure that SRMS data can be gathered more effectively into the future, we have piloted an entry-level raptor monitoring survey and we will shortly be publishing a first set of national (Scottish) and regional (SRMS Region and NHZ) trends in breeding numbers and productivity, which has been one of the key aims of the SRMS since its inception.



A huge thank you to all those that have been involved in the journey so far, whether you have been involved in submitting your monitoring data to us from that first breeding season back in 2003 or whether your journey with us is only just beginning.

Avian Influenza is currently causing high mortality in seabird populations in the Northern Isles and North Scotland, but what our readers may be less aware of is the increasing numbers of raptors that are also succumbing to the current strain of the virus. We have an invited piece from Gabriela Peniche on this subject. In this issue, we also have a fantastic article from Patrick Stirling-Aird giving a historical perspective on both Golden Eagles and Peregrine populations in Central Scotland, news of the worthy raptor workers in receipt of both the 2021 and 2022 Donald & Jeff Watson awards, alongside our usual updates on SRMS work.

Amy (Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator)

Happy 20th Birthday to us!

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group are a dedicated group who represent the nine SRMS partners and oversee the Scheme's work programme. Below are just some of their messages as we celebrate our 20th year.



Some current and former members of SRMG. From left to right: Brian Etheridge (SRSG and former Raptor Monitoring Officer 2003-2014), Amy Challis (Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator 2014-present), Mark Eaton (RBBP), Patrick Stirling-Aird (SRSG), Mark Holling (RBBP), Andrew Stevenson (NatureScot & SRMS Chair), Chris Wernham (BTO), Mark Wilson (BTO) and Wendy Mattingley (SRSG).

"NatureScot and Scottish Natural Heritage before it, have been key in establishing and supporting the SRMS and I've had the pleasure of being chair of the SRMG which oversees the SRMS for more than half its existence. The progress it has made to date is a tribute to the tremendous amount of work put in by the partner organisations and the past and present Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinators. The number of records submitted to the SRMS has doubled since the first report in 2003, whilst, 'Raptors: a field guide to survey and monitoring', has proved an indispensable guide to raptor monitoring. The SRMS data continues to play an important role in raptor conservation in Scotland, something we can all be proud of".

Andrew Stevenson (NatureScot)

"The long-term commitment of raptor workers and representatives on the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group to making the SRMS a success has been incredible. It has been a real privilege working with such skilled and experienced people with a shared passion for Scottish raptors, and here's to the next 20 years!"

Chris Wernham (BTO)

"Being involved in the SRMS has had enormous benefits for Forestry and Land Scotland. Raptor Study Group workers across Scotland share their data and knowledge with FLS staff and this has greatly improved our conservation management of raptors. It's a model of collaboration between species experts and land managers and helps raptors to live in forests that produce huge amounts of timber for the people of Scotland".

Kenny Kortland (FLS)

"The Rare Breeding Birds Panel have been proud to be part of the SRMS from the outset, and to have seen the scheme go from strength to strength through partnership, sharing of knowledge and experience, and the sheer hard work of all involved".

Mark Eaton (RBBP)

"RSPB Scotland is delighted to be part of SRMS, and to see the ongoing collective expertise of raptor workers being harnessed for the greater understanding of raptor populations in Scotland".

Nick Wilkinson (RSPB)

"The work undertaken through the SRMS has contributed significantly to our understanding of these species and the impacts of land management on them. The information provided by RSG volunteers has been invaluable for helping to inform good practice guidance and is continuing to help inform sustainable forestry in the contribution towards tackling both crises of climate change and biodiversity loss".

Juli Titherington (Scottish Forestry)

"Our members across the mainland and the larger islands are very proud of the contribution made towards the Scheme and how it informs the ongoing conservation needs of Scotland's raptors. Members begin their site monitoring in mid-winter with eagles with the season running through to autumn with late fledging Barn Owls and are driven by their passion and concern for the birds safe in the knowledge their data submitted to the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme is stored and curated by colleagues at the BTO. The Scheme is an exemplar of what can be achieved through the power of citizen science and partnership working and will hopefully encourage others in the conservation sector to do likewise".

Brian Etheridge, Wendy Mattingley, Patrick Stirling-Aird & Logan Steele (SRSG)

"Since its formation in 2002, the SRMS has set new standards in the monitoring of breeding raptors, and improved our ability to report on their breeding numbers, productivity and population trends throughout Scotland. As a result of this important work, we are now in a far stronger position to further the conservation of these charismatic birds. The SOC have been proud to be a member of the SRMG, and we look forward to supporting the SRMS during the next 20 years".

Mike Thornton (SOC)

Where it all began...

First established on 24 June 2002, the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme is now a partnership of nine organisations, with the following objectives:

- *Co-operation*: to promote better co-operation between the various bodies responsible for gathering information on Scottish raptors, to increase the coverage of raptor surveys in Scotland;
- *Survey and monitoring*: to provide robust information on Scottish raptor populations, in order to report on trends in numbers, range, survival and productivity, to understand the causes of population changes and constraints on raptor populations, and to enhance the volunteer base available to contribute to data collection;
- *Data and information standards*: to maintain and enhance consistent and high standards for the collection, collation, auditing, analysis and curation of data;
- *Analysis and reporting of information*: leading to the production of annual reports on raptors in Scotland, and to support national and international reporting requirements, notably in relation to the EU Birds Directive, the Convention on Migratory Species, and the Memorandum of Understanding on the conservation of migratory birds of prey in Africa and Eurasia.

These objectives arose originally from the recommendations of the *Report of the UK Raptor Working Group* (2000). This report provides an important framework for developing work on raptors in Scotland and within the UK as a whole. It made recommendations on further improvements in monitoring and reporting on raptors, as well as specific recommendations on raptors and conservation, legislation, moorlands, racing pigeons, the lowlands and songbirds. SNH, working with others, provided a formal response to the Scottish Executive on the *Report of the UK Raptor Working Group*.

On 16 April 2002 the (then) Scottish Executive responded to SNH's advice on the 25 recommendations in the report. The SRMS was established to address the recommendations relating to Scotland. The Scheme is now building on the work carried out during the initial years, to continue to improve the surveillance, monitoring and understanding of raptors.

Save the date!

We look forward to welcoming you to our 20th birthday celebrations.

Friday 25th November – (2-4 pm programme of talks, followed by a celebratory drinks reception until 5 pm) at Atholl Palace, Pitlochry, Perthshire.

Our event will be linked to the Scottish Ornithologists' Club annual conference (Friday 25th – Sunday 27th November) which this year will be themed around raptors.

More details on how you can book to attend the SRMS celebratory event and/or the SOC conference will be made available later this year.

Avian Influenza and raptors

Avian influenza or avian flu is caused by a number of different viruses called Influenza A viruses. They can infect six animal species or groups (wild waterfowl, domestic poultry, swine, horses, dogs, and bats) in addition to humans. These viruses are endemic within each group of species, meaning each species has its own usual virus(es) and these regularly infect and transmit between individuals.

In birds, wild aquatic birds (waterfowl) such as swans, ducks, geese, terns and gulls, and shorebirds, such as storks, sandpipers and plovers, are considered hosts or reservoirs for the virus, meaning they can carry it in their lungs or intestines and can get on with their lives without showing signs of infection. These infected individuals can then shed the virus in faeces, saliva or nasal secretions whilst migrating or if they happen to deposit any of these above or close to aviaries, get preyed upon by other species, such as raptors, or hang around or die near a water bodies, these viruses can reach other species. In the specific case of raptors, those that feed on water birds or carrion would be more likely to be exposed to the virus by feeding on live or dead individuals. Infection in humans due to bird viruses are rare but can happen if enough virus gets into a person's mouth, nose or eyes. When viruses from a specific species manage to infect another species a new variation of the virus may occur and because neither of the species would recognise it as the usual virus, then it can cause disease more easily and transmit between individuals of both species more readily, with pandemic potential, just like we have seen with the swine flu before. During the spring and summer months, when many species of water birds spend time breeding and raising their young in north eastern Asia, they mix with other species and this is an opportunity for the virus to be shed, picked up by other species and mutate.

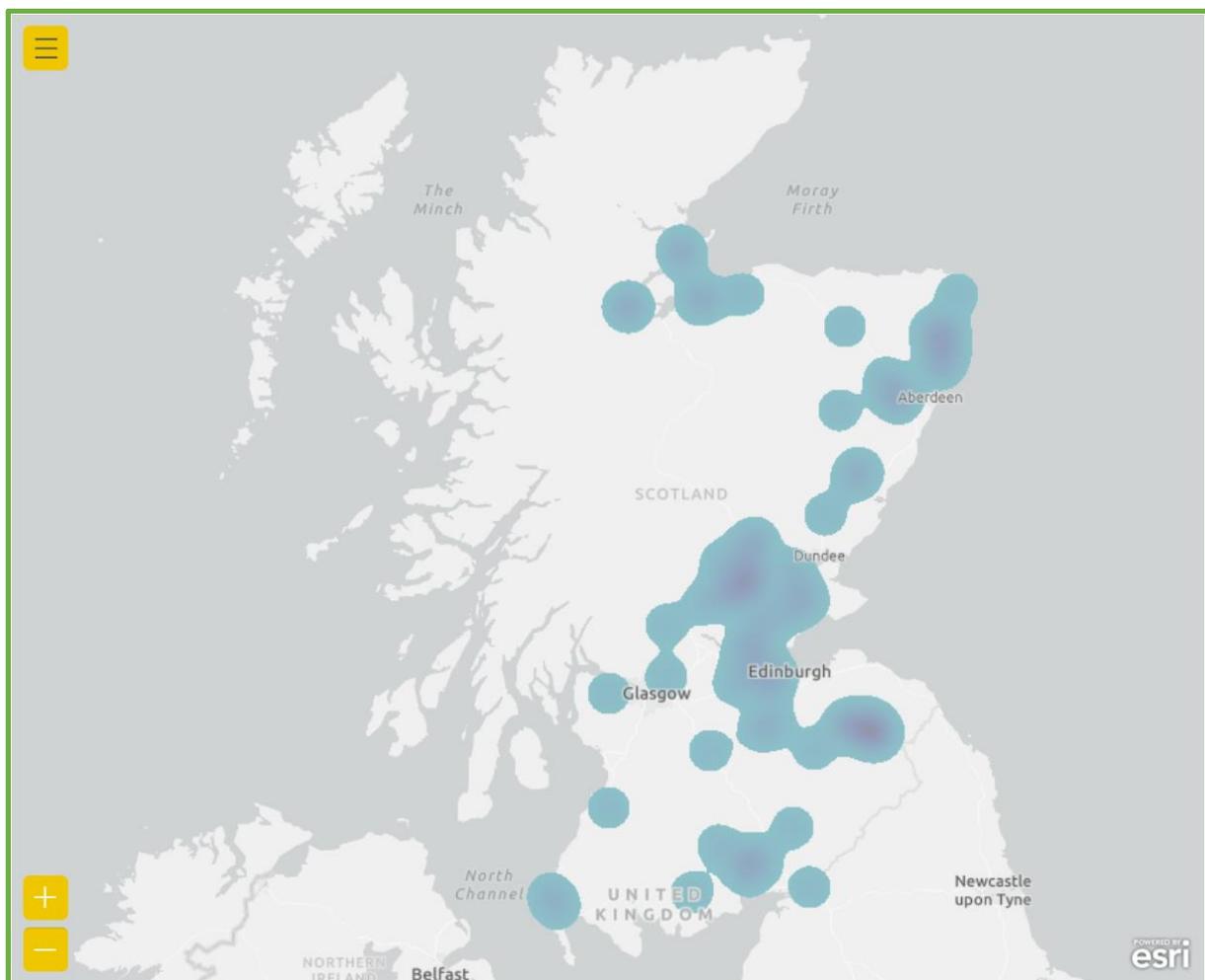
Occurrences of flu in poultry can follow a similar pattern to those in humans, once or twice a year we see an outbreak of flu spreading across the population but it dies down after a period of time. In previous years, this had been the case in the UK, however, since October 2021 we have seen more than 50 outbreaks of the virus and the spread of the infection across wildlife has been unprecedented with over 3000 deaths in species such as barnacle geese, but also in 125 raptors since the start of 2022. In previous years one or two cases of avian flu detected in raptors per year were the norm. The recent spring and summer impact of the outbreak on seabirds has led to the Scottish Government establishing an HPAI response group to progress an HPAI Response Plan. The group includes representatives from SG, Marine Scotland, JNCC, Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA), RSPB and BTO. NatureScot also has an AI coordination group, meeting once a week to keep track of the situation (weekly monitoring reports, status of sample collection, guidance and any new advice from APHA) and steer surveillance requirements and communications.

This year, the virus has been detected in wildlife across Scotland (in Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll & Bute, Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Dumfries and Galloway, East Dunbartonshire, City of Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow City, Highland, Midlothian, Moray, North Lanarkshire, Orkney, Perth and Kinross, Renfrewshire, Scottish Borders, Shetland, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Lothian). In raptors, the virus has been reported by Defra in eight different species: Buzzard, Red Kite, Kestrel, Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk, Peregrine, White-tailed Eagle and Tawny Owl. Some of these would be considered more at risk of infection due to their feeding habits, however for others the route of transmission may be a bit more of a puzzle. The way in which these cases make it into the avian influenza DEFRA report is by detection of the virus in two swabs (one taken from the mouth and one taken from the cloaca). Following positive results in these swabs no

other action is taken to conduct a post mortem investigation, so we know the virus was present in the bird but it is unknown if the virus was causing disease or only being transported by the bird (as a host). A full post mortem and immunohistochemistry studies to look for abnormalities in tissues or antibodies to the virus inside the different tissues would be needed for us to better understand how the virus may be affecting raptor populations. Defra and Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) are prioritising testing suspected cases in new geographical locations or in new species to track both geographical spread and breath of species affected. To assist this NatureScot would also welcome rapid reporting of any suspected AI raptor cases directly to us. Contact Andrew.stevenson@nature.scot.

You are able to see the results of testing carried out by Defra and the APHA [here](#) and an interactive map showing all cases of is available [here](#). Buzzards are the main raptor species testing positive to date.

In order to help understand the impact of the virus on raptor populations raptor workers are encouraged to report any dead raptors to Defra and ensure that nest failures are recorded fully (with AI clearly identified where either confirmed or suspected) with the SRMS.



Heat map showing cases of Avian Influenza in Accipitriformes 17th November 2021 – 17th May 2022.

- As a result of recent discussions all bird ringing/handling connected to seabirds has been suspended with immediate effect to minimise risks of spread. **This includes all non-seabird species in seabird colonies and will apply to any raptors breeding there.**
- **Dead/sick birds should not be picked up or disposed of.** As a notifiable animal health disease there are protocols about carcass collection and disposal.
- **Strict biosecurity** should be followed when ringing/handling raptors, especially so where raptor diet is likely to involve high risk species groups (e.g. seabirds/waterfowl), which may be present as prey remains at/near a nest.
- **Any single dead raptors** should be reported to the Defra helpline: 03459 335 577 (as well as 5 or more dead wild birds of any species found at the same location, as always).
- The advice regarding picking up raptor carcasses at the moment for any suspected persecution case from the POLICE continues as usual. Any **raptor carcass** found where persecution is suspected should be reported to the **Police**. To report a wildlife crime you can telephone the non-emergency **101** number and ask to speak to the WCLO for your region or a local Wildlife Crime Officer in the division if one is available. The 101 number should be used to contact the police when you don't need an emergency response. **In an emergency always dial 999** – when a life is in danger, a crime is in progress or a suspect is nearby.

Garbriela Peniche and Andrew Stevenson

A historical perspective on Golden Eagle and Peregrine populations in the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group area

There is a long pedigree of monitoring of both Golden Eagle and Peregrine, enhanced by the work of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups from their formation in 1981. A principal reason for the introduction of these Groups was to improve coordination of individual raptor fieldworkers' survey of these two species, initially for a UK-wide Peregrine national survey in 1981 and then for a Golden Eagle national survey in 1982. In their earliest years the Scottish Raptor Study Groups' interest was focused to a large extent on these two species, not least in the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group area. Over subsequent years this interest in raptor monitoring has expanded to bring in breeding season survey of all of Scotland's diurnal raptors, owls and the Raven.

I have taken as a basis of this article the successive Golden Eagle and Peregrine population levels in the Group's area, revealed by the 1992, 2003 and 2015 Golden Eagle and by the 1991, 2002 and 2014 Peregrine national surveys. These survey results give for the two species the best available comparisons of increase (properly perhaps, recovery) from earlier years, of stability for the Golden Eagle and (in the case of the Peregrine) of the decline of its population in the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group area over this 24 years timespan. Some information is presented here on annual productivity of both species. Arguably however the more important measure is fluctuation of the birds' breeding populations in terms of numbers of territory-holding pairs.

Golden Eagle



Golden Eagle chick, Perthshire (Photo by Keith Brockie, T&FRSG)

Historic data (going back over the last 70 to 80 years or so) reveal dedicated Golden Eagle fieldwork carried out in what is now the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group area by Leslie Brown, Jim Lockie, Charlie Palmar (although I am not sure if he was active in Golden Eagle survey east of Argyll) and in particular Pat Sandeman, formerly living in Edinburgh but subsequently after he had retired in Bridge of Allan and then in Killin. Pat did a lot to put Golden Eagles “on the map” in a figurative sense but also once in a literal sense, witness Adam Watson’s account of a visit along with Charlie to Pat’s

house in Edinburgh when the two of them were ushered with great ceremony by Pat into a locked upstairs room, behind the door of which was a black sheet. Pat ripped the sheet off, revealing a map of Scotland with scores of pins representing Golden Eagle nests.

A paper entitled The breeding success of Golden Eagles in the southern Grampians by Pat Sandeman published in “The Scottish Naturalist” in 1957 describes an area of some 1,650 square miles (1,056,000 acres) of hill ground as holding 14 Golden Eagle pairs at that time. The fieldwork underpinning this paper was carried out from 1950 to 1956 inclusive and on the face of it indicates a surprisingly large average Golden Eagle home range size of about 75,000 acres. However, the overall study area contained a substantial extent of what may have been good foraging ground for Golden Eagles but which apparently lacked suitable crag or tree nesting sites. Clearly this study area extended eastwards from the present Central Scotland Raptor Study Group’s boundary to encompass ground in what became part of Tayside.

Although no precise boundary limits of the study area are given in Pat’s paper, one can reasonably deduce that at that time and of the stated number of 14 Golden Eagle pairs, around 9 were located in the Central Scotland section of his study area. That figure accords quite closely with the actual Central Scotland population level, at least at the time of the 1992 and 2003 national surveys. It is no surprise to read that there was substantial persecution (both Red Grouse and hill sheep-related) at that time in Pat’s study area. For example and irrespective of whether or not the Golden Eagle was the intended target of the gruesome activity in question, there were two recorded instances of birds seen in flight but carrying gin traps attached to their legs. To what extent such persecution restricted the territory holding segment of the Golden Eagle population of Central Scotland cannot be reliably assessed although subsequent higher population levels may provide a clue to this.

As an example of contrasting attitudes within Central Scotland, in 1982 one Golden Eagle pair on what was then predominantly sheep ground was reported to have last bred successfully in the late 1940s. It did not start producing young again until 1990, following a change of ownership. On the other side of the coin a nearby pair on an estate where there was more emphasis on Red Deer than on sheep (and probably little interest in Red Grouse) fledged 18 young in the ten years 1973 to 1982 inclusive. There is no doubt that at that time live prey numbers in the Central Scotland part of Pat's study area were well in excess of levels that are there at present so those Golden Eagle pairs that were left alone may have reared more fledged young than one might expect to record now.

Moving on to the more modern era, Dave Dick when he was the RSPB's Investigations Officer in Scotland did a lot of Golden Eagle monitoring in the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group area. Dave's fieldwork, initially for the 1982 Golden Eagle national survey but continuing into the 1990s, built on the earlier data gathered by Pat Sandeman. As a further impetus towards monitoring of the species, since 2014 there has been a Central Scotland Golden Eagle Sub-group, chaired by Kevin Duffy. The thinking behind the formation of this sub-group was three-fold, to fill in gaps in knowledge of the Golden Eagle in Central Scotland, to give a sharper focus to monitoring of the species there and in the short term to work up towards the planned 2015 national survey. It was felt that through the sub-group complete year by year survey coverage of this small segment of the Scottish Golden Eagle population would be achieved.

1992, 2003 and 2015 Golden Eagle national survey results for Central Scotland

	TERRITORIES CHECKED	PAIRS	SINGLE BIRDS	UNOCCUPIED	SUCCESSFUL PAIRS	NUMBER OF YOUNG
1992	10	6	3	1	2	2
2003	10	6	1	3	3	3
2015	13	9	2	2	4	5

For the sake of consistency, there are excluded from these figures two territories treated as Central Scotland ones for purposes of the 1992 national Golden Eagle survey but from which thereafter the birds "jumped ship" over the boundary to Tayside. These figures demonstrate the stability of the Golden Eagle population in Central Scotland in recent years but some further explanation is called for. In 2015 three additional territories were visited, all of which were not "new" in any real sense as they had been known in earlier years, before the first national Golden Eagle survey of 1982. These three territories (one of which probably must be classed as no more than occasionally occupied) came to light again only after the 2003 survey had taken place but are now known to represent re-occupations rather than hitherto unknown territories in any absolute sense. One can currently put at 14 the total of known Central Scotland Golden Eagle territories as two locations 3.5 miles apart, formerly treated conservatively as alternatives for the one pair, were proved by 2018 to be occupied by separate breeding pairs. A mystery is the exact status of Golden Eagles in a location near the edge of the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group area where a pair has been seen in recent years but where diligent searching has failed so far to turn up a current nest site.

Turning briefly to the questions of Golden Eagle nest sites and of productivity, all of the known Central Scotland nests are and at the time of the national surveys were on crags with none occurring in trees. In two separate but still extant territories in what is now much-visited and hence from the Golden

Eagle's perspective unduly disturbed hillwalker country, in each case south-facing sites up at the 2,700 ft. level were used in the 1950s/1960s but have not been occupied in more recent years. Known productivity of the Central Scotland Golden Eagle population from 1992 onwards has ranged from between just a single fledged young in one particularly poor year to 6 young reared by 5 successful pairs in both 2014 and 2020.

Peregrine

Leaving aside original 1961/1962 survey work carried out during the organo-chlorine pesticide contamination era, formal Peregrine monitoring in the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group area has a shorter history than does its Golden Eagle counterpart but it might be said to have been more systematically constructed. In 1965 John Mitchell, former Nature Conservancy Council Warden at Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve, commenced his Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Peregrine survey. Reports produced by John, from 1968 to 1991 inclusive, show each year's data obtained from his Peregrine monitoring. John had been motivated to study the Peregrine by Derek Ratcliffe who of course had organised the 1961/1962 survey on behalf of the British Trust for Ornithology, and did much of the fieldwork for it. This survey had been requested by the then Nature Conservancy in order to investigate the apparent drastic decline of the Peregrine in Britain.

John Mitchell's Peregrine records inherited from Derek Ratcliffe reveal a surprising finding. This was that in 1961/1962 (just one year before Peregrine numbers in Britain were assessed as being at their lowest level) of 13 territories visited in what was to become the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs study area, no less than 8 pairs were found plus one apparent single bird and 4 territories seemingly unoccupied. The surprise is that of these 8 pairs 2 in particular were within easy reach of low ground hunting terrain where at that time and by contrast with the hill country, pesticide effects might have been expected to have been the more likely to have led to territory desertion. Admittedly against that expectation, farming in that part of the country was and remains more pastoral than arable.



Juvenile Peregrines, South Ayrshire (Photo by Angus Hogg, SSRSG)

Presumably there was less organo-chlorine pesticide use in the former than in the latter. The 1971 and 1981 national Peregrine survey results showed in John's study area recovery to 12 pairs in 15 territories checked in 1971 and to 31 pairs in the 33 territories that were visited in 1981, in the latter year by which time there was a much higher total of known Peregrine territories to be surveyed.

As in the case of the Golden Eagle, clearly persecution and other forms of interference with Peregrines was prevalent not so long ago in Central Scotland. The remnant of a gamekeeper’s stone hide was found under one nest crag, situated on what was formerly grouse moor but which subsequently became a Forestry Commission plantation. The profit motive was alive and well at another location, a site overlooking a now disused railway line where it seems that there had been a railway workers’ tradition of removal of Peregrine chicks or live trapping of fledged young or the adult birds for sale for falconry purposes. The presence of a small stone cairn at the site indicated that conceivably a method of catching Peregrines there might have been to employ the old gamekeeper’s trick of setting a gin trap well-padded with cotton wool, to avoid injury to the birds and thus to enable their onward sale to falconers.

To an extent this report’s description “Loch Lomond and the Trossachs” is a bit of a misnomer since effectively, and particularly in the later years, John Mitchell’s survey covered the entire Central Scotland Raptor Study Group’s area of responsibility with the exception of North Lanarkshire, of which more later. The two man team of John Mitchell who carried out a substantial amount of Peregrine ringing and was assisted by his colleague John Mason recruited for the necessary climbing was joined in 1973 by Don MacCaskill (Forestry Commission District Officer at Strathyre) and by me four years later.

When he came to Strathyre in 1973, Don MacCaskill set about monitoring those territories of both Golden Eagle and Peregrine that were within reasonably easy reach of his home base. Thus he contributed much to the knowledge of both species in Central Scotland. Don was well known as a wildlife photographer and his images of Golden Eagle and Peregrine (among many other species) feature in various published works. From its inception in 1965 in particular but also into the late 1970s/early 1980s Peregrine monitoring in Central Scotland involved a certain amount of what one might call pioneering work, following up on indications from others of the presence of these birds and confirming the existence of suspected breeding territories. Although I hardly knew him at the time Derek Ratcliffe, who was then Nature Conservancy Council Chief Scientist, gave me some very helpful information to this end. There was the elation of finding new Peregrine pairs at a time of population recovery but the inevitable depression which set in later when the subsequent disappearance of many of these pairs became apparent.

1991, 2002 and 2014 Peregrine national survey results for Central Scotland

	TERRITORIES CHECKED	PAIRS	SINGLE BIRDS	UNOCCUPIED	SUCCESSFUL PAIRS	NUMBER OF YOUNG
1991	50	38	4	8	21	49 minimum
2002	50	31	4	15	10	20 minimum
2014	50	21	2	27	7	12 minimum

The above figures relate to only the Clackmannanshire, Dunbartonshire, south-west Perthshire and Stirlingshire parts of the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group’s area of responsibility. They exclude a Falkirk “industrial site”, a territory monitored by the Lothian & Borders Raptor Study Group through George Smith. More significantly however but for the sake of consistency between national survey years, the figures exclude the North Lanarkshire records since in the early years of



Peregrine monitoring in Central Scotland a rather neglected part of the Group's area was North Lanarkshire. That omission was put right in subsequent years through the comprehensive Peregrine monitoring now carried out in North Lanarkshire by Jackie Gilliland and others. In terms of both territory occupation and breeding success North Lanarkshire contributes substantially to Central Scotland's overall Peregrine population statistics. There were 12 known North Lanarkshire territories in 2021 and a minimum of 19 young fledged there in that year.

What is the most likely reason for the decline in Peregrine numbers in Central Scotland between 1991 and 2014? Increasingly over that timespan (although also before that) there has been less attention paid to Red Grouse management, to the extent that such management has almost disappeared in that part of Scotland. There is little apparent racing pigeon activity or interest in much of the area, at least north of the Highland line it seems. Naturally one cannot be completely sure, but there appears to be very little in the way of Peregrine persecution in Central Scotland now although there has been suspicion as to one likely Red Grouse management-related exception in recent years. Presumably chemical contamination can be ruled out since, if this did occur, it would be more likely to have harmed the robust lowland sector of the Central Scotland Peregrine population where one would have expected chemicals to have more readily transferred to the birds. Another factor although perhaps not a major one could be dominance of some of the airspace by Golden Eagles.

That brings one back to the now familiar theme of decrease of prey species in the uplands, as has been suggested perhaps adversely affecting the Merlin as well as the Peregrine. Available prey birds may have become too widely dispersed, necessitating excessively long hunting trips by the parent Peregrines. At one now deserted territory the adult male Peregrine brought back to the eyrie crag a freshly killed Red Grouse, its weight being not far short of that of the average male Peregrine. Even although he had made the return journey easier for himself by first removing the head, both wings and one leg had he had to travel just one mile or perhaps say ten miles for this prey item? In the hill country and in general, Central Scotland's Peregrines have retreated to their old ancestral and historic territories centred on large and what one might call their traditional nesting crags.

Patrick Stirling-Aird (Golden Eagle & Peregrine & Species Coordinator, CSRSG)

SRMS Annual Reporting

Our annual report reporting on the 2020 breeding season was published in February, and we are currently preparing the next report which will be published in November to coincide with our celebratory event. As part of this report the SRMS is planning on publishing National (Scotland) and Regional (SRMS Regions & Natural Heritage Zones) trends in breeding numbers and productivity for all species for which trends production in viable. We are very grateful to Species Coordinators in various SRSB branches who have provided feedback following consultation to sense check these trends over the last few months. This feedback is currently being assessed ahead of finalising trends for publication.

SRMS Funding

NatureScot have recently finalised project funding for this financial year and have confirmed they will be contributing £118,200 to the SRMS for 2022-2023.

At our last SRMG meeting in February partners discussed options to be explored to diversify the Schemes funding base for the future and heard from Mike Naidu (BTO fundraising) who gave a really helpful overview of the current funding scene. A meeting is being organised for this coming Autumn involving RSPB and BTO fundraisers to start early discussions around what might be possible in terms of funding the SRMS in the future.

Changes in SRMG

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group has recently welcomed Juli Titherington around the table representing Forestry Scotland. Juli has replaced Colin Edwards who left Forestry Scotland to take up a role in Forestry & Land Scotland in April.

Appeal for images and video footage as part of our 20 year celebrations

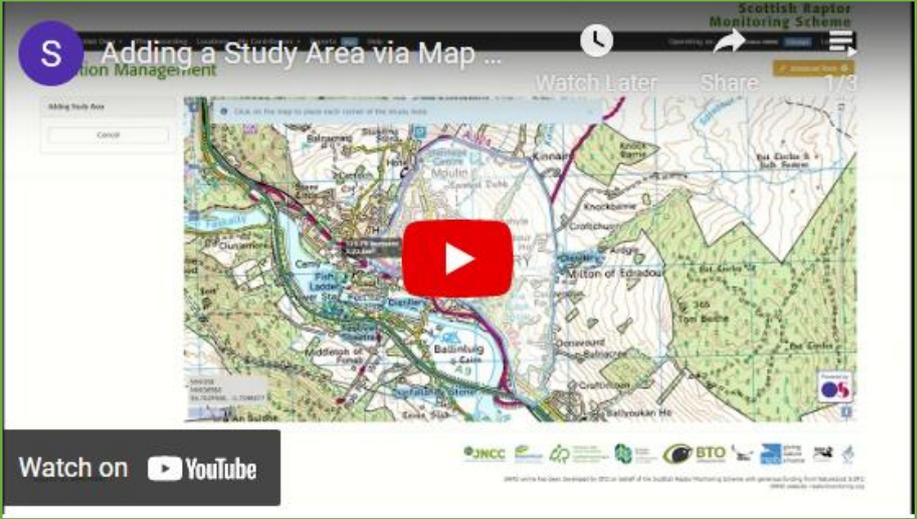
I would love to hear from you if you have any images or video footage that you are happy to share with me that can be used as part of our 20 year celebrations (or held for future use in any other Scheme products such as the annual report and presentations). I am particularly interested in images/footage on the theme of 'People enjoying raptor monitoring in Scotland'.

SRMS Online

It is great to see so many of our data contributors embracing SRMS Online to input their 2022 data. If you would like to join the growing number of contributors submitting their data to the SRMS via our preferred route please get in touch for help with getting your SRMS Online account set up.

Tutorial videos

A number of tutorial videos have been produced to help new and existing users get to grips with SRMS Online <https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-online/tutorials>



The videos have been organised into themed playlists:

- Tutorials to help you get started
- Further 'Location Management' tutorials
- Further 'Visit Data' tutorials
- Further 'Managing Permissions' tutorials

and can be watched directly on the SRMS website or via YouTube.

Quick reference Guides

A number of Quick Reference Guides have been produced to help data contributors ensure they are recording all the information valuable to collect for SRMS Online. <https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-online/quick-reference-guides>. Check out the 'Visit Log Details' guide which contains a handy table that can be completed out in the field on each visit.

Further developments

We are continuing to develop the system to make improvements. You can find out about latest developments at <https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-online/latest-developments>. If you spot any 'bugs' in the system or have any suggestions for improvements that can be considered please do get in touch.

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 2021 the award was presented to Dave Dick and 2022 to Derek Hayood, respectively. Below are the citations from Central Scotland Raptor



Study Group and Argyll Raptor Study Group, delivered at the most recent Scottish Raptor Study Group Conference where the awards were presented.

Dave Dick (2021)

Before reading this nomination it is accepted that this award is in recognition of amateur/unpaid contributions however it should be remembered that whilst Dave has made huge and significant contribution. While he carried out his role in a paid professional capacity it should not be forgotten that he also carried out a great amount of fieldwork and monitoring which was unpaid at the same time. It is impossible to separate where one finishes and the other begins.

Dave grew up in rural Ayrshire and at age 30 obtained 2 x degrees, arts and science.

January 1984 when Dave took over from Pete Ellis as “Species Protection and Investigations Officer” for the RSPB in Scotland. Pete was Dave’s line manager for the 1981 Argyll peregrine contract, the 1982 Perthshire and Argyll Golden Eagle contract and the 1983 Lewis and Harris Golden Eagle contract.



Dave Dick.

Dave “inherited” all Pete’s contacts and all the problems of the job. Dave was inspired and influenced not only by Pete but also by Roy Dennis and Adam Watson.

Pete Ellis singlehandedly put together the first raptor groups outside the Highlands and North-East Scotland. Himself building on the concept and ideas of Roy Dennis and Adam Watson.

That concept being that these groups were to be composed of active field workers, specialising in the study and protection of birds of prey. The groups would centralise the data and knowledge gathered to further our understanding of the ecology, populations and also threats and opportunities for the birds. Inherent in this was a largely unwritten “code of ethics” when working with raptors – basically that the welfare and safety of the birds came first.

These first groups under the “direction” of Roy, Adam and Pete were growing during a period of similar growth of the conservation movement in the late 70s and early 80s. Dave first made contact with a few members in 1981, when he was taking part in his first RSPB contract – a census of peregrine falcons across Argyll [roughly Glencoe to Southend; Arrochar to Ballachulish] which is very hilly!....

Dave met many raptor workers and was hugely impressed by them. Very few were employed in conservation – there were very, very few jobs in that line back then. These men [they were all male] ranged from a retired Gaelic scholar and scion of a wealthy sherry dynasty to a deerstalker/photographer - it included a police sergeant, schoolteachers and a retired architect and ex- WW11bomber navigator. They all knew far more about peregrines than Dave who was at this time a raw recruit...as you can imagine he learned a lot more from them than just bird ecology.

Back then Dave had to gain the goodwill of many of these contacts. Raptor workers who were by nature very independently minded people used to working in challenging conditions – steep cliffs, tall trees, open country in all weathers – and often in the face of fierce opposition from raptor haters...but also against the misunderstanding of their “hobby” by their own families. Raptor work was not a mainstream obsession back then – to put it politely Raptor workers were considered a bit weird.

1. Through contacting and being contacted by raptor workers [and often going out in the field with them] Dave extended the RSG network in Scotland to cover the whole of mainland Scotland and the Uists. The drivers for this included lack of knowledge of the populations of many species but also a growing awareness of the danger of repeat nest visits to birds such as Golden Eagles, by both local and visiting enthusiasts.

2. With the perceived success of the Scottish groups Dave received enquiries from various parts of England, Ireland and Wales from raptor workers keen to set up their own RSGs. To help with that he attended inaugural meetings of groups in Cumbria, Northern Ireland and Eire. After that they started springing up all over the place!

Dave was always contactable and willing to give assistance and gave a lot of advice over the phone and in letters to help these embryonic groups.

3. In the early days Dave acted as chairman of several groups, criss-crossing the country for twice yearly meetings, always at night. These groups included being chair of the South-west Scotland; South-east Scotland; and Uists groups.

3. Along with the indefatigable Patrick Stirling-Aird, Dave eventually set up the SRSR network and ran the first SRSR annual conferences. These conferences helped cement together the occasionally fractious and suspicious groups. He particularly remembers his delight at watching all these dedicated raptor workers from very varied social backgrounds all in earnest discussion, or poring over maps and pints together – to Dave a dream come true.

4. Dave never hid the fact that the group members were also a major source of information on the persecution of raptors – from providing reliable counts of persecuted populations to actual eye witnessing crimes. That helped his “day job” immensely....but he also knew that these folk had to trust him to work with him. Dave always tried to lead from the front – carrying on his own eagle and peregrine fieldwork for years and being on call, round the clock. He accepted–“this isn’t a job, it’s a vocation”. Dave tried very hard to fully respond to persecution reports which was recognised across the board by many.

5. Dave had no patience with the few members who tried to say “we can’t rock the boat; we need to ignore the crime to continue our studies” that kind of attitude became increasingly rare as inroads were being made into raptor crime – together. RSPB and RSG members.

6. During his tenure Dave managed to get some very disparate bodies to liaise together in the investigation of wildlife crime. Including RSG members.

In the “primitive” early days Dave would have to collect suspected killed raptors from remote locations, take them to a vet he had personally cultivated in Edinburgh and pay for them to be x-rayed. If positive for bullet or shot, he would then take them to the police to try to get some action. Nine

times out of ten they would ask him to store the bodies [in the RSPB freezer]. If no obvious shooting or trapping injuries were found Dave started up a long term and highly successful liaison with the Department of Agriculture pesticide analysis unit and also the Veterinary Investigations Centre in Lasswade.

If lucky enough to see a suspect apprehended Dave would then liaise [face to face meetings and phone calls were the norm] with the Procurator Fiscal concerned. Often writing reports for fiscal to use in court in addition to expert witness statements. If an RSG member was a witness he would talk them through court procedure.

Dave attended a staging total of around 350 cases with court action between 1981 and 2006 and on several occasions gave direct testimony from the body of the court to Sheriffs. On one occasion he lent copies of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to Sheriffs, in court!!

7. All of the above work provided Dave a certain amount of expertise in initial analysis in the field, of crimes against raptors and along with newly created Wildlife Liaison Officers, [WLOs]. He was able to teach RSG members much of that knowledge.

8. By encouraging the growth of the police WLO network by meeting and working with WLOs from every Force in Scotland and importantly, introducing them to their local RSG at meetings, conferences and in the field – Dave cemented and enabled a wildlife crime enforcement network for the whole of Scotland and beyond, through UK contacts.

9. Unfortunately it was not all plain sailing and good news. Much of Dave's efforts were eroded by the shooting lobby mostly through the SGA.

At the time Dave was retiring, there was little direct contact with RSPB and individual police [with a few glorious exceptions] none with Fiscals and none with the Crown Office. Dave and Keith Morton helped draft the first two "Crown Office liaison with non-reporting agencies" reports with Crown Office staff, relationships at that time were that close – they came to RSPB Christmas parties.

Whilst it is accepted that the Watson award is for amateur efforts and much of the above was without doubt paid work it should be noted however that the borders between Dave's paid professional work and unpaid hobby work were often virtually non-existent and he managed to carry out both roles simultaneously.

Dave carried out his paid role at the same time as he carried out a huge amount unpaid monitoring and fieldwork. This mainly included peregrine, and golden eagle, the latter in Glen Lochay, Perthshire.

In 1984, the peregrine fieldworker for SE Scotland, the late George Carse, was incapacitated for the whole field season. Dave agreed to stand in and took over his sites [dots on a map!] for that year and continued with him and others, to monitor that rapidly growing population for many years.

Dave often returned to Lewis and visited some of his eagle sites from 1983 as there was virtually no local raptor work taking place out there. In the Uists he had an annual visit to train up whoever was the Balranald summer warden, by taking them round half a dozen of the more accessible nesting pairs, that lasted several years and benefits including meeting Iain Macleod, who became my first full time assistant in 1986.



Dave continued to monitor the West Perthshire Golden Eagles right up to his retirement.

Dave moved to Moffat in 2007 and has continued monitoring which includes a local golden eagle, several peregrines sites when asked by Chris Rollie, the odd nesting goshawk and more recently red kites which have attempted to breed near Moffat. I also carried out fieldwork for the recent Honey Buzzard survey.

Dave was a true pioneer and much of his work has helped shape the field of raptor study and protection.

He has been responsible for catching and convicting more wildlife criminals in Scotland than anyone else. Having participated in well over 1000 land searches during his career.

The mere mention of the name 'Dave Dick' still manages to strike fear on many an estate.

His close encounters are many and include being stuck hanging on the end of a rope hanging for many hours underneath an isolated eagle eyrie, bitten by an adder climbing into a peregrine nest resulting in him being helicoptered off an island to a mainland hospital.

His expert knowledge, professionalism, enthusiasm, ability to continually manage disappointment and likeability has influenced a great many and personally was a tremendous inspiration and font of knowledge.

Dave's contribution to raptors through, field work, monitoring, joint working, enforcement and protection went well above what he was paid to do as part of a contract or job, Dave lived raptors and put everything he had into understanding and protecting them.

Dave retired quietly and without fuss and I think it is fitting that he is acknowledged by his peers in particular for his unpaid work and dedication.

Derek Hayward (2022)

Derek Hayward started his work on raptors around 50 years ago working alongside Geoff Horne monitoring and ringing Ravens in the Lake District.

Derek started looking at Golden Eagles in Argyll in the early 90's where he watched a few on the mainland, however, a visit to Mull in the late 1990s led to him becoming involved the island's Golden Eagle population. He persisted even though there was not much encouragement from others, but his dedication won them over. For over 20 years now he has been monitoring the bulk of the population on the island (46 territories).



Derek receiving his award from David Anderson

Outside the census years Derek provides over 10% of the reports the breeding success of Golden Eagles in Scotland, providing not only a valuable contribution to the national dataset, but also monitoring the situation within the Special Protection Area for Golden Eagle on the island. This arduous undertaking to monitor over 35 sites has provided the core information used by others in invaluable studies on the conservation of the Golden Eagle (e.g. the Golden Eagle Framework, Paul Howarth's work on Golden Eagles and Forestry). While not yet analysed, his dataset will also be invaluable in tracking any impact of the increasing population White-tailed Eagles on Mull.

Derek's climbing abilities are legendary. He has an uncanny ability to trust three tent pegs with his life, which has led to many stories and the odd heart stopping moment! He's put a lifetime into his obsession and has enthusiastically helped many on their journey into raptor monitoring. As a quiet, determined and hard-working member of Argyll RSG, with a good sense of humour, easy to get on with and a true countryman, he is a worthy nomination for

the Donald and Jeff Watson Raptor Award.

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