

# Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

As the 2022 monitoring season is drawing to a close many of our readers will be bustling away trying to bank all the valuable data that they have collected over the course of the monitoring season. To those in particular that have embraced SRMS Online for inputting their data this breeding season – a massive thank you. I mentioned in the last issue that I was aware that the system was not working optimally for everyone, but after a raft of improvements that we had made over the summer, I have been receiving some really positive feedback.

Over the last few months I have been enjoying attending a number of the Scottish Raptor Study Group branch meetings and it has been so lovely to see people face-to-face properly after all the disruption of the last couple of years. This year the SRMS is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and below you can find out how you can **secure your free place at our celebratory event on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> November**. I really hope to see many of you there to be able to thank you for your involvement.

In this issue we have a few feel good stories from SRMS contributors – an Osprey platform success story from the Highlands and a Barn Owl nest box project update from the Lochwinnoch area. If you would be keen to offer an article for a future issue or have suggestions for articles that you would like to see, I would love to hear from you.

*Amy (Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator)*

## Secure your place at our 20th Anniversary Celebrations!

You are now able to book your free place at the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme's 20th Anniversary celebrations at **Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry, Perthshire on Friday 25th November**.

Booking is essential. Please visit the link below to secure your place.

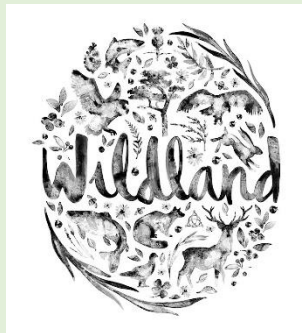
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/scottish-raptor-monitoring-scheme-20th-anniversary-celebration-tickets-428565760727>

### TALKS PROGRAMME (2-4 PM)

- **Welcome** Amy Challis (SRMS Coordinator)
- **Why raptors are brilliant** Brian Etheridge (Scottish Raptor Study Group)
- **Our greatest achievements** Andrew Stevenson (SRMS Chair)
- **The importance of volunteers & Raptor Patch** Logan Steele (Scottish Raptor Study Group)
- **How SRMS data are used by SRMS partners** Kenny Kortland (Forestry & Land Scotland)

- **Raptor monitoring – the international context for SRMS** David Stroud (formerly Joint Nature Conservation Committee)
- **Raptor monitoring in action** – Video
- **Thoughts from the Minister for Environment & Land Reform** Mairi McAllan MSP
- **The rise and fall of a population of Buzzards over the last 35 years** Mike Bell (Tayside & Fife Raptor Study Group)
- **SRMS trends in breeding numbers & productivity** Chris Wernham (British Trust for Ornithology)
- **Close and welcome to drinks reception** Amy Challis (SRMS Coordinator)

**DRINKS RECEPTION** (4-5 PM) – generously sponsored by [Wildland](#)



We are very pleased that the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC), one of our SRMS partners, has agreed to our celebratory event being linked to the Club's annual weekend conference (Friday 25th – Sunday 27th November), which this year is themed around raptors. Attendees at the SRMS event who wish to book a place at the SOC conference or stay for the Friday evening conference programme (including dinner, talk and quiz) need to book directly through the Club.

## SOC 2022 Annual Conference 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> November

Bookings are now open for the SOC's annual weekend conference which is themed around raptors. For the full conference programme details and to book, visit <https://www.the-soc.org.uk/support-us/events/events/the-2022-annual-conference>. To whet your appetite below are the main raptor talks in the line-up...

### FRIDAY

- **Raptor conservation in Scotland: a millennium of good deeds, dastardly acts and promise** – Prof Des Thompson, NatureScot

### SATURDAY

- **Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme** – Dr Amy Challis (SRMS)
- **The Common Kestrel in Ireland** – Dr Kez Armstrong (BTO)
- **Changes in raptor ranging behaviour in response to altered levels of human activity during COVID-19 lockdowns: A community-driven, global-scale analysis** - Dr Rob Patchett (University of St Andrews)
- **What evidence is there for the presence of an ecological trap in a UK population of Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis*?** - Katie August (University of Aberdeen)

### SUNDAY

- **Raptor Study Group data shed light on UK Merlin declines** – Dr Ian Johnstone (RSPB Cymru)
- **South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project: Year 5 Update** – Dr Cat Barlow
- **Can raptors make good detectives? If so, what can they tell us about the health of the Scottish Environment?** – Dr Gaby Peniche (University of Edinburgh)
- **Urban-breeding Goshawks in the city of Hamburg, Germany** – Prof Christian Rutz FRSE (University of St Andrews)

## Updates to the SRMS Data Sharing & Use Policy

In September the SRMS Data Sharing & Use Policy was updated to reflect changes in gatekeepers for JNCC, RSPB, Scottish Forestry & SOC.

The Policy can be found on the SRMS website: <https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-data/data-sharing-use-policy>.

## An Osprey pair given a helping hand after winter storms

I have been monitoring an Osprey pair in South Inverness-shire since 2011. In March 2012, the heather surrounding the original nesting Scots Pine tree was set on fire deliberately, eventually killing the tree. The pair of Ospreys did return to the site that year but failed to breed. During 2013 and 2014, no birds were seen at this site.

One day in early April 2014, I carried out a search in the general area with the hope of finding a new nesting site for this pair and had the good fortune to locate the new nest near to the original one with the pair on territory.

Each year since 2014, the pair have bred successfully at this same site which featured in the BBC1 TV series "Highlands – Scotland's Wild Heart" in 2016.



Knowing that I monitored this nest, Roy Dennis, Osprey Coordinator for the HRSG emailed me in March this year to say that, through the RSPB initially, he had been contacted by a young family living near by the nest saying how distressed they were that the nesting tree had blown down during one of the winter gales.

A visit confirmed that tree and nest had indeed blown down and I met up with the young crofting family nearby to assure them that it would be possible to build a new nest with a good chance that the returning birds would use it.



I immediately contacted Brian Etheridge to set up building a starter nesting platform in a nearby tree with the help of HRSG member and tree climber Jimmi Hill. This was accomplished in the nick of time on the 18th March, as, just as the final stick was placed on the new nest platform, an early arriving adult Osprey overflowed the site!



By early April, the adult female Osprey was seen incubating on a newly built nest and on the 25th June, 3 well grown healthy chicks were ringed by Brian and myself with the young crofting family looking on. A final visit on the 8th August revealed the three successfully fledged young perched on the rim of the nest awaiting their long journey to West Africa.



This was a valuable and rewarding opportunity to be able to give a young family first-hand experience in the field and to describe the life of the Osprey with a hope of encouraging young people and parents to take an interest in our natural world.

Adam Ritchie (Highland Raptor Study Group)

## SRMS Online improvements

If you are one of the many data contributors that have now switched to SRMS Online to share your data with the Scheme each year, then a huge thank you.

Since our last issue back in June we have made a whole raft of new improvements which I am confident have significantly improve user experience of the system, making it quicker and easier for you to find your way around and input your data efficiently.

Among other changes (see <https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-online/latest-developments>) we have revamped the Home Page to enable users to get to where they need to be more quickly and users no longer need to set up Visit Logs from scratch each year as they get initiated automatically. The development which I am personally most excited to have rolled out to users is the ability to click on a location in 'Map View' or 'List View' and be taken through to the relevant Visit Log to input visit data.

Overall these changes should make SRMS Online much easier to use and encourage more raptor volunteers to come on board with the new system, ensuring that production of the key scientific products from the SRMS (trends and data for conservation use) will be easier and more efficiently produced.

Picture: Having clicked on a visit location, users can now click on an 'Add Visit Data' button and be taken through to the relevant Visit Log for that Home Range to record data from their monitoring visit.

If you are yet to come on board with SRMS Online please don't hesitate to get in touch to find out more and get help in setting up an SRMS Online account in good time ahead of the 2023 breeding season.

## Boxes for Barnies

During the winter of 2020/21, Clyde Branch of the SOC launched their Boxes for Barnies project <https://www.the-soc.org.uk/news/boxes-for-barnies> - a collaborative effort funded by the Branch and [Garnock Connections Landscape Partnership](#) (supported by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund).

Local group members worked with the Lochwinnoch community to construct and install nest boxes for breeding Barn Owls in the area, with the aim of boosting the species' recovery and numbers in the region.

The scope of the project had originally been to install 12 nest boxes (a mixture of ready-made, bought boxes and those constructed by volunteers), but due to the tremendous efforts of the nest box construction volunteers, and the ongoing demand from people wanting to have boxes put up on their properties, the group managed to install an incredible 19 nest boxes -all in Renfrewshire, in areas identified as priority for the species. Boxes have been homed in a variety of locations, including farms and suitable private residences.

After an excellent Barn Owl breeding season in 2020, those involved in the initiative had high hopes that a few of the project's boxes would be occupied in 2021. Unfortunately however, it was to prove a poor breeding year for the species and only one box was used. Box recipients had been made aware that it might take some time before their box was used.

This year however, the team are delighted to report that three of the project's nest boxes have been used for breeding by Barn Owls (another was used by Jackdaw!).

Zul Bhatia, Project Lead and Clyde Branch Chair commented: "Barn Owl populations are known to fluctuate widely, mainly in relation to prey availability, and we are hopeful that this local population will increase"

All three boxes used by breeding Barn Owls this year fledged three young ('owlets') each. Take a look at this wonderful clip of owlets, filmed from a respectful distance by Zul Bhatia, at one of the project's nest boxes



*Three young Barn Owls photographed, under licence, at one of the project's nest boxes, August 2022. Copyright Zul Bhatia.*

<https://twitter.com/ZulBhatia/status/1560026953637367809> Licensed and experienced ringers from local Clyde Ringing Group, ringed the owlets, with the utmost consideration for the bird's welfare. Ringing provides much useful information on the health of the species, longevity, dispersal, etc and underpins conservation work for the owls. Find out more about the practice here <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/ringing>

Zul Bhatia (Chair of SOC Clyde branch and Barn Owl Coordinator, South Strathclyde SRSG branch)



## JNCC – departure from SRMS partnership

After being a partner of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme since its inception, JNCC have withdrawn from the partnership. Due to their UK remit they are no longer able to be formal partners to country level projects and partnerships. JNCC remain supportive of the Scheme and will still provide advice to the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group when required. The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group are grateful to JNCC representatives over the years for their contributions – David Stroud who was involved from the very beginning up to his retirement from JNCC in 2019 and his successors Danny Heptinstall and Matt Parsons. The SRMS website and other SRMS products will be updated shortly to reflect JNCC's departure.

## Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) contact

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