

Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

Spring is in the air and I'm sure many of you will already have been out and about undertaking early visits to study areas to check for occupancy. We wish all our readers that are out in the field a successful monitoring season.

As well as bringing you updates direct from the SRMS, this issue includes articles about a Peregrine Falcon colour-ringing project in South Strathclyde, results of the latest Red Kite winter roost census and an update from the National Wildlife Crime unit. You can also find out more about the winner of this year's Donald & Jeff Watson Award – an award from the Scottish Raptor Study Group to specifically recognise 'A significant long-term amateur contribution to the study of raptors in Scotland'. We also take the opportunity to mark the huge contribution that Patrick Stirling-Aird has made to raptor conservation in Scotland as he retires from the role of Secretary for Scottish Raptor Study Group.

As always, 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 Challis (Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator)

Thank you to SRMS data contributors!

BTO was delighted to be able to secure sponsorship from Swarovski to produce a thank-you gift for each of our data contributors for your dedication to the SRMS over the last two decades.

We hope you will like the lens cloths we have had designed and produced, to help keep your binoculars and scopes in tip-top condition for raptor surveying!

While just a small token of our appreciation, we hope that these will bring you some fantastic views of raptors for this breeding season and many more to come!

If you are a member of the Scottish Raptor Study Group, you will be able to get yours via your branch Chair. If you are an independent SRMS data contributor (e.g. taking part in *RaptorPatch*) you will receive yours with a hard copy of our next annual report.



Peregrine Falcon colour-ringing project in South Strathclyde

The Peregrine Falcon has long been my favourite bird. What's not to like? Fastest creature on the planet, fiercely protective of their young, graceful on the wing, but still sadly threatened.

Many moons ago on a birding trip to Sweden, I read a magazine article on a project to colour-ring Peregrine Falcon chicks around the Stockholm area. A seed was sown...

In 2021 a female was spotted at Glasgow Cathedral wearing colour leg-ring L7 (this bird had been ringed as a chick at Norwich Cathedral in 2019). L7 attempted to breed in 2021 and failed but successfully nested the following year. This ringed female continues to be seen regularly around Glasgow city centre, helping to keep the local feral pigeon population under control. A great story!

There are a few colour-ringing projects for Peregrine Falcon running in England, but we are not aware of any currently running in Scotland.

In 2022, we approached BTO and were allocated a sequence of colour-rings to start our own colour-ringing project and we managed to ring eight chicks from three nests in Renfrewshire and North Ayrshire. A standard metal BTO ring was fitted to the right leg; an orange plastic ring with a three character alpha-numeric code was fitted to the left leg. During the ringing process, we also took cheek swabs which were sent to a national DNA database. George Smith (Lothian & Borders Raptor Study Group) is the project lead responsible for the upkeep of the project and the annual renewal of the project permissions. Thanks to Mark Rafferty (Central Scotland Raptor Study Group) for help during the ringing process.



Adult male at East Renfrewshire site in February 2015 (Scott Maxwell).



Scott Smith ringing female chick at Renfrewshire site in June 2022 (Scott Maxwell).



Taking a DNA cheek swab in June 2022 (Scott Smith).



X7A being ringed, a male at a Renfrewshire site in June 2022 (Scott Maxwell).

Subsequent visits were made to check for fledged juveniles at or near the nest site and the photos below reveal how well the colour rings can be seen (with a little patience and luck).



X3A fledged male at a North Ayrshire site in July 2022 (Scott Maxwell)



X7A fledged male at Renfrewshire site in July (Scott Maxwell).



Juveniles at a North Ayrshire site in June 2022 (Scott Maxwell).

At the moment, we have only colour-ringed young birds, but in future adults could also be included (e.g. rehabilitated birds).

We plan to continue this as a long-term project and hope to invite other raptor groups and ringers to join in, to help build the number of ringed birds. We have a batch of rings and would be happy to share. Please feel free to get in touch with either Scott Smith (scott.eagle-eye@hotmail.co.uk) or myself, Scott Maxwell (scottjamaxwell@aol.com).

We also would be grateful for any recoveries from sightings, photographs and even dead/injured birds. In August 2022, a colour-ringed juvenile Peregrine was seen and photographed taking a gull in front of RSPB Lochwinnoch reserve, almost certainly one from our project. Unfortunately, the bird was too distant for any detail to be obtained from its ring.

Hopefully in the coming years, together with George Smith's PIT-tagging project, we can build a better understanding of post-fledging dispersal, movements, and survival rates of these amazing birds. Who knows where these birds can end up, after all their scientific name *Falco peregrinus* means wandering falcon!

Scott Maxwell (South Strathclyde Raptor Study Group)

External Evaluation of the SRMS

NatureScot has commissioned work to evaluate the SRMS. This is to help inform ongoing decision-making within NatureScot about priorities and funding. Previous annual and three-yearly assessments have been internal to NatureScot but, as the SRMS has reached a milestone of 20 years, NatureScot feels it is an appropriate time to reflect on the objectives and achievements of the Scheme.

Shirley Muir Associates (<https://www.shirleymuir.co.uk/>) were contracted to address four aims:

- To provide a review of how well the structure and functioning of the SRMS delivers its stated objectives, and those of the 1995 UK Raptor Working Group report;
- To provide a review of the impacts of the SRMS in terms of its stated objectives;
- To assess whether the SRMS is managed efficiently and represents value-for-money; and
- To identify learning points that may address any issues identified in the objectives 1-3 and ensure Scheme progress can be monitored.

Over the last few months Shirley has been speaking to each of the partner organisations in the Scheme to gain their knowledge and insight for the evaluation and Shirley attended our most recent SRMG meeting in February to update the Group on progress with the external evaluation. Summary findings will be disseminated more widely in due course once the external evaluation has concluded.

The Donald and Jeff Watson Raptor Award

The Scottish Raptor Study Group Conference initiated 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 2023 the award was presented to Keith Brockie of Tayside & Fife Raptor Study Group, delivered at the most recent Scottish Raptor Study Group Conference where the award was presented.

Although born in Haddington, East Lothian, Keith was brought up in Strathmiglo, Fife and went to Bell Baxter High School in Cupar, Fife before going to Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee, where he graduated in 1978. He went on to work as an Illustrator at Dundee Museum and Art Gallery, and after a short period working there, he went freelance as an artist specialising in wildlife.

His involvement in ringing and conservation of birds of prey started when he joined Tay Ringing Group in 1972, training under the supervision of Dave Oliver. Through the group he met Norman Atkinson and Mike Nicoll and they focussed initially on waders (adults and chicks), Heron chicks and visiting the Isle of May. During the early years they only managed a few Heron chicks per year as they had to free climb the nesting trees. However, after the acquisition of a third-hand rope, helmet and GPO climbing irons, they were soon managing up to 200 Heron chicks a year.

In 1974, Keith had his first stab at direct conservation, when he voluntarily acted as warden of a mixed Tern colony at Shelly Point on the Eden Estuary within the boundary of the Leuchars Air base. After about 3 weeks, he reprimanded a chap for walking his dog through the colony and asked him to leave. The chap in question turned out to be the base commander.

Apparently, word of the reprimand spread through the base like wildfire and caused much hilarity among the service personnel. The base commander on the other hand did not see the funny side and ended Keith's stint as warden.

At about the same time, Keith and Mike met Adam Ritchie and Alec Rollo who were monitoring Peregrines in Angus. Their initial plan was just to ring the chicks, but they soon ended up monitoring territories as well.

When Adam Watson set up North East Raptor Study Group in 1980, which included the areas of East Perthshire and Angus, Keith was one of the founding members along with Robert Rae (Skitts), Ed Duthie, Alec Rollo, Adam Ritchie and of course Mike Nicoll. Here he quickly developed his knowledge and passion for monitoring Golden Eagle and Peregrine. He started monitoring the fledgling Osprey population in Perthshire in 1982, and from a handful of pairs in the early days, the population now stands at over 45 breeding territories.

During the 1980s and 90s he spent a lot of time on direct conservation of Ospreys, helping with nest protection duties including supporting the RSPB investigations team. In May 1990, one of the Osprey nests being protected by Keith and others was targeted by the notorious egg collector Wayne Short. As Wayne made his way to the nest, he was intercepted by 4 Royal Marine Commandos whom Keith had enlisted as part of the surveillance team. He was charged with possessing items used in the collection of eggs and was fined £2500 and had his car confiscated.

Keith's tree climbing skills were ideal for building nest platforms and ringing chicks. In his early tree climbing days he fell from a Larch tree (a tricky tree species) whilst checking an Osprey nest but was fortunate to be able to pick himself up and dust himself down without serious injury. At times Keith still free-climbed trees, as he felt that safety harnesses "slow you down" despite the risk.

In 1991 Keith built the current Osprey nest at Loch of the Lowes, Dunkeld, along with Alan Barclay who was the SWT ranger at the time, using an old potato basket to form the base of the nest. His colour ringing at this nest as well as others, and satellite tagging studies, have yielded volumes of data on the dispersal, migration and longevity of the species.

Keith also developed a long-term study of Golden Eagle territories, East of the A9, where he built good relations with stalkers and keepers on Atholl estate who provided a lot of valuable intelligence on activities at the eyries he was monitoring. These good relations were also key for a lot of his Osprey sites as well, his network of shepherds, birdwatchers and local residents provided useful leads as the birds spread across Perth & Kinross.



Keith Brockie together with Roy Dennis fitting a satellite tag to a Loch of the Lowes Osprey chick in 2013.



T in the park 2016 (Keith Brockie)

Over the years Keith has also liaised with foresters, estates and RSPB to prevent disturbance at key nest locations during the breeding season, including advising the T in the Park festival when it moved to Strathallan airfield for a year, close to an active Osprey nest.

Following the formation of the Tayside Raptor Study Group in 1991, which brought together members from both Central RSG (Perth & Kinross) and NERSG (Angus), he became its first Chair, a post he held until 1998.

Being freelance, Keith's time in the field not only benefited the monitoring of birds of prey but gave plenty opportunity to study and develop his own unique sketching and painting style, which can be seen in the many works he has completed over his career.

In the course of his work, he has travelled widely to many countries and regions, including Scandinavia, Tanzania, India and North America, he has also participated in expeditions to Greenland and Svalbard with the British Schools Exploring Society, teaching about wildlife and field sketching.

With numerous publications, exhibitions and illustrations (including the highly regarded Jeff Watson book on Golden Eagle) under his belt, he continues his work from his gallery overlooking Loch Tay, where he can observe Osprey breeding nearby via telescope.

The Scottish Raptor Study Group logo, with which we are so familiar, is another of Keith's fine illustrations and is the recognisable hallmark of the network used in communications and publicity.

Keith has been a huge influence on many group members, passing on skills, enthusiasm and knowledge to those willing to learn. For this reason and for his 40+ years of experience monitoring and conserving birds of prey, Tayside & Fife Raptor Study group make this nomination for the 2023 Donald & Jeff Watson Award.

Supporting the 2023 National Hen Harrier Survey

The SRMS is pleased to be supporting this year's National Hen Harrier Survey by providing the option for those that wish to submit their data via SRMS Online. A final set of survey instructions has been shared with those participating in the survey and is available: <https://raptormonitoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Instructions-for-Hen-Harrier-Surveyors-opting-to-submit-their-data-via-SRMS-Online.pdf>

You can follow progress with this years Hen Harrier survey via the RSPB's blog:

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/science/posts/can-you-help-with-the-hen-harrier-survey-2023>

Amy - Oot and about

Over recent months I have enjoyed attending several local SRSG branch meetings, where it is always great to meet SRMS data contributors face-to-face to bring them the latest news from the Scheme and listen to their views.

Last month I also ran a number of virtual SRMS Online training sessions, which were well attended.

Following the SRMS marking our 20th Anniversary last year, together with Andrew Stevenson (SRMG Chair) I was invited to contribute to an SOC podcast. Mark Lewis (SOC Birding & Science Officer) was keen to learn more about the work of the Scheme. The podcast can be accessed on a range of platforms:

Acast – <https://shows.acast.com/some-ornithological-chat/episodes/some-ornithological-chat-with-amy-challis-and-andrew-stevens>

Apple – <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/some-ornithological-chat/id1635138214>

Spotify – <https://open.spotify.com/show/6bPVJfSjt3wZA6lxysQFL6>

To find out about and access other episodes in the SOC 'Some Ornithological Chat' series, please visit the SOC website: <https://www.the-soc.org.uk/content/get-involved/podcast>

2023 marks the 50th year of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and as part of marking their celebrations, I was invited to talk at their virtual online conference in March. You are able to view all the presentations from this conference at the following link – <https://rbbp.org.uk/2023/03/17/the-rbbp-50th-anniversary-conference/>

Scotland Red Kite Winter Roost Counts



Red Kite (Alfonso Godino)

Over the weekend of 7/8 January 2023, Scottish Raptor Study Group contributed once again to the Europe-wide Red Kite winter roost census coordinated by Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux, BirdLife France and LIFE

EUROKITE <https://www.life-eurokite.eu/en/news.html>. Most known roost sites were counted by about 20

volunteers from across Scotland in good conditions, and a total of 1,047 birds were recorded. By comparison, on the first weekend of January 2022 a total of 982 birds were counted at Scottish Red

Kite roosts. The general trend is an annual increase. The first Scotland-wide winter roost

count took place in January 2015 and 548 birds were counted, so we have seen an effective doubling of the Red Kite winter roost population over the past eight years. This year the largest regional total

of 411 birds was recorded in Dumfries and Galloway. In Highland there were 221 birds; Central and Perthshire 165 birds; Aberdeenshire 65 birds; and Angus 185 birds.

Red Kite roosts are mostly attended by juvenile and sub-adult birds and winter roost counts are one helpful indicator of the health of the population, particularly now that not all nest sites are monitored each year, and as the population expands into new areas. We hope, for example, in the coming years to see winter roosts establishing in both Lothian & Borders and South Strathclyde RSG areas. If anybody is interested in becoming the point of contact for Red Kite winter roost counts for these groups, please get in touch with Duncan (orrewing1@aol.com).

Thank you to all of those SRSB members who participated in this event in 2023, and we will go again in January 2024!

Duncan Orr-Ewing (Red Kite Species Coordinator for Central and Tayside and Fife Raptor Study Groups & Coordinator for UK and Ireland Red Kite Winter Roost Census)

Next steps with SRMS work on trends

In November we were delighted to be able to produce a first set of national and regional trends using SRMS data. However, we were unfortunately rather limited in the trends we were able to produce for a variety of reasons. We were only able to produce a national trend in breeding numbers for a single species (White-tailed Eagle), which is a shame given the amount of monitoring activity that currently happens across Scotland. We of course understand that much of the monitoring work that goes on currently was not set up with the production of national trends in mind (and that it delivers lots of other benefits to raptors too) – but we would nevertheless really like the SRMS to be able to produce a more comprehensive set of trends so that we can track progress with raptor conservation more effectively and comprehensively (e.g. whether the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/wildlife-management-and-muirburn-scotland-bill> leads to positive changes for raptors).

SRMG met on 1st February to begin discussions about how we might produce more comprehensive trends in the future. A short paper was prepared ahead of this meeting, not to provide all the options but to provide a structure in which to capture ideas of solutions that could be explored. We all agreed at the meeting that it would be valuable to get broader ideas captured from as many data contributors as are willing to contribute, so that all ideas can be explored further.

Some of the potential solutions might involve asking for some redirection of monitoring efforts to support robust trends production in the future (for example, if you currently take a purely site-based rather than area-based approach to your monitoring, asking you to consider changing this so that you more comprehensively cover the ground between known sites each year). An increase in use of SRMS Online, and users particularly using the additional functionality that has been specifically built to support capture of Study Area boundaries and effort recording against these will also make a huge difference in terms of providing the information we need to produce more robust trends from more regions. At this point in time all ideas have been welcomed for consideration.

SRMG also discussed the idea of setting up a wider Working Group to discuss and explore developing this work further and is very supportive of this idea. **If you feel that you might be interested and willing to contribute to such a group in future, please contact Amy.**

National Wildlife Crime Unit update

Firstly, many thanks to all the raptor workers who obtained buccal swab or feather samples from wild Peregrines and submitted them to SASA. This has been an absolutely vital part of an ongoing police enquiry that will create positive change. Please continue to submit your samples.

There are a number of ongoing police enquiries into illegal wild taking of peregrines in the UK. Some of these will be false declaration cases (where the declared parents of chicks are evidenced through DNA not to be the parents), some will go a step further and evidence where chicks have actually come from, this is where raptor workers are key.

You are the group most likely to bring incidents to our attention, either a live incident where you see something suspicious actually happening or where you have suspicions of something having happened:

- Should you see something you suspect to be a crime in progress phone 999, explain clearly that what you are observing you suspect to be a crime contrary to Sec 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (killing, taking, disturbing etc.). If it is safe to do so, continue to observe and record what is occurring and try to get descriptions of the persons involved and their vehicles, particularly registration numbers. Your safety is paramount though, keep your distance.
- Should you suspect a crime has occurred (e.g. eggs/chicks gone and signs of human activity such as footprints or rope marks) then phone 101 to report, request a local wildlife officer is made aware and also contact me.
- Should you not have physical evidence of criminality but you do harbour suspicions of nest failing (e.g. years of success then a recent pattern of failures) then get in touch with me direct or with your local wildlife crime officer if you already have that contact.

Investigative techniques in wildlife crime have hugely improved in recent years. This is due to the fact that policing and government view wildlife crime as serious crime. The courts now have increased sentencing powers (up to 5 years imprisonment), and this has opened up the investigative tools at our disposal. Recent cases have utilised surveillance, DNA, searches under warrant, banker's warrants, cyber-crime analysis and the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA).

We have some cases due to come to court in the near future which will demonstrate the techniques being utilised and the sentencing powers the courts now have at their disposal. Hopeful this will act as a deterrent.

Raptor study workers are experts. Your suspicions are policing's intelligence to apprehend those responsible for raptor persecution as you may hold the piece of the jigsaw we need to identify a location, an individual, secure a warrant or obtain a surveillance authority. There may be occasions you are asked to be a witness and provide a statement but if what you are providing is intelligence it will be sanitised, locked down and firewalled. Basically, nobody other than the inputting officer will know who passed the information. Should you still have concerns about speaking to police you can still report via Crimestoppers which can be done completely anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Gavin Ross, PC H1140, National Wildlife Crime Unit: 07867 328144 (office hours)
07922 180479 (24/7 – emergencies only)
gavin.ross@nwcu.police.uk

PC Gavin Ross, Scottish Investigative Support Officer (NWCU)



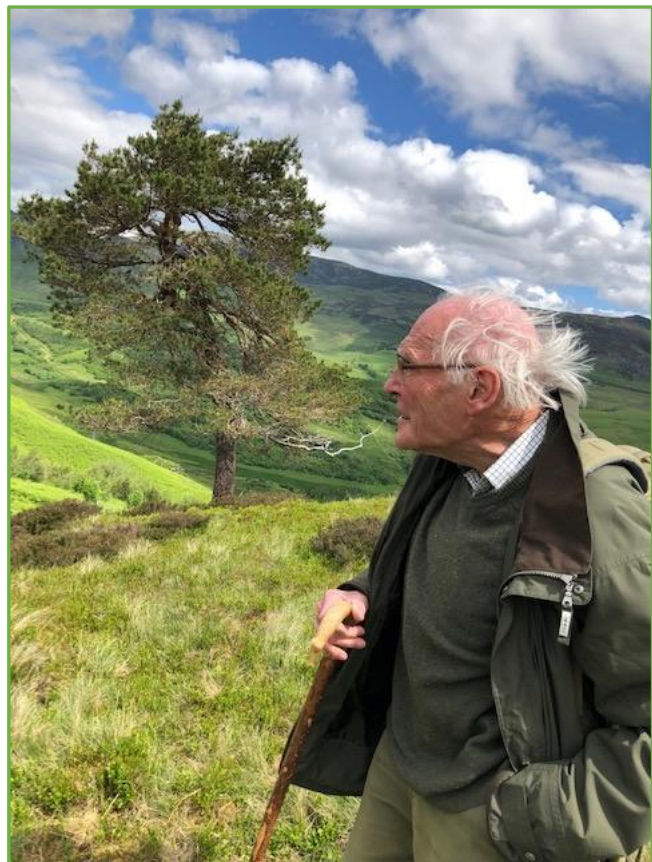
Patrick Stirling-Aird MBE retires as SRSB Secretary

This February saw Patrick Stirling-Aird retire as Secretary of the Scottish Raptor Study Group after an amazing 23 years in the role. His contribution to the SRMS was recognised at the recent Scottish Raptor Study Group conference by fellow SRSB members. Below is a transcript of the presentation that was delivered by Duncan Orr-Ewing (CSRSB Chair) to honour this remarkable achievement. Happy Retirement Patrick!

The Scottish Raptor Study Group is extremely fortunate and proud to have had Patrick Stirling-Aird as our Secretary for more than 20 years. It is believed that Patrick started in this role on 19th February 2000. I have been asked to say a few words to recognise the massive contribution Patrick has made to raptor conservation in Scotland. I hope that I can do this justice.

Whilst we all know and admire Patrick in his SRSB lead-administrative role, I would like to start in giving some background on Patrick's early years, as well as his raptor experience, knowledge and credentials. Patrick became interested in the environment as a small boy, and according to his wife Sue, was particularly fascinated by insects in his formative years. This interest was encouraged by his grandmother, and for his eighth Christmas she bought him "The Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs" by T.A Coward. The three volumes were digested in detail and voraciously by the young Patrick and this began a lifelong passion for birds. Whilst at Edinburgh University Patrick and group of friends spent many weekends walking in the Scottish hills and it is then when he developed an interest in raptors, and especially the Peregrine Falcon.

In his book "The Peregrine Falcon" of 2012 Patrick claims to have seen his first Peregrine more than 40 years ago, so going back to the early 1970s. He says it was these first sightings, and the recognition of the Peregrine as an "ecological barometer", that got him involved with formal raptor monitoring. At this time, raptor monitoring was pioneering work promoted especially by Derek Ratcliffe, who warmly acknowledged Patrick's work and influence in his own monographs on the Peregrine and Raven. Patrick mentions that it was the late John Mitchell then of the NCC, the late Don MacCaskill of the then Forestry Commission, Pat Sandeman, and Bob MacMillan wearing various hats, who first got him involved with much more detailed Peregrine monitoring. Don and Bridget MacCaskill became lifelong friends and Patrick, Sue and I very recently attended the celebration of Bridget's life at Balquhider Parish Church following her death over Christmas at the age of 100. Her partner Don passed away 20 years ago. In the 1970s and when Patrick took up raptor monitoring in west Perthshire encouraged by John Mitchell,



Patrick Stirling-Aird (Susan Stirling-Aird)

the Peregrine had of course become an extremely rare breeding bird following the pesticide crisis caused by DDT and Dieldrin in the 1960s and as revealed by those dedicated individuals who monitored peregrines across the UK at the time.

I first met Patrick in the early 1990s and when I became a member of the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group, having moved down from the Highlands. He was the Chair of CSRSG since its formation in 1983 and only stood down seven years ago. In the 1990s we met for our spring and autumn CSRSG meetings in the rather grand surroundings of Kippenross in Dunblane - in Patrick's dining room. At that time our membership was limited to about 10 hardy individuals including the aforementioned Don MacCaskill and John Mitchell. Patrick was definitely in charge of monitoring Peregrines, Golden Eagles and Ravens. It amused me at the time that other species including Ospreys and Red Kites, my own passions, were given relatively short attention at meetings! Owls were barely mentioned unless prompted (something that has not changed greatly)! The focus was clearly on the three key raptor species – Patrick's birds! What was also clear was Patrick had huge attention to detail. Patrick was trained and worked as a solicitor and brought this attention to detail to his raptor monitoring. His minutes of meetings were exemplary. His raptor data record keeping was, and still is, second to none. When discussing particular raptor sites, he could call on an extensive background history of each site rigorously documented year by year. If anybody was asked to monitor any Peregrine sites for him or to search certain glens for occupancy, you could expect a full documented history of that site, sometimes going back for over 50 years, detailing alternative sites, productivity, and information on how to access to get the best view of nests. At that time in the early 1990s, I took over monitoring many of John Mitchell's Peregrine sites in Loch Lomond and received huge encouragement from Patrick, anxious that data for critical long term monitoring sites was not lost.

Patrick's own study area has always been across the boundary between Central Scotland and Tayside and Fife Raptor Study Group areas. He has monitored all of the Peregrines from Glen Artney up to Glen Almond and across to Stirling for decades. He has also monitored the breeding Golden Eagles and Ravens in these areas. However, when discussing other sites for these species in these RSG areas there do not seem to be many that he has missed during his time either! For SRSRSG nationally in Scotland, and for CSRSG and Tayside RSG more locally, he has coordinated national population surveys for Peregrine - in particular in 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2014.

By Patrick's own admission he likes to monitor his birds alone. He also impatiently waits for the good weather to go and do his work on the hill. Characteristically he wears his "plus twos", and when he goes out, he tends to spend all day on the hill monitoring on one or a small number of sites in a day, and spending hours observing Peregrines and Eagles from a distance, observing and noting behaviour carefully. I have monitored raptors, albeit sometimes different species, over decades in a broadly similar area to Patrick, and what has also struck me from my own conversations with folk on the ground is the respect that he also carries with the landowners, gamekeepers and stalkers. Patrick has always made time to speak to estate owners and their employees both before and after his monitoring visits. In my time, I have rarely heard anybody saying a bad word about Patrick, even when he has had to have the difficult conversations with estates about the suspicious disappearance of birds he has been monitoring or their apparently criminal breeding failure! On one rather difficult case Patrick was asked to go and give evidence in court against one gamekeeper on land where he had been monitoring raptors for years – not at all pleasant. Patrick is calm, forceful and never shies away from conflict, as also reflected to me in my research for this presentation by another longstanding friend of the Peregrine/Golden Eagle and Raven, Wendy Mattingley. Patrick produces an annual newsletter for

estates and their staff on the birds he has monitored and his reflections on the overall breeding season that year for the Eagles, Peregrines and Ravens.

Sadly, in many parts of Patrick's study area he has been monitoring a decline in numbers of breeding Peregrines in recent decades in line with national trends for this species in the Scottish uplands, however the ravens have been faring well, and the Eagles that he monitors are now largely free from human interference. With regards Ravens, Patrick is definitely a crag nesting Raven person, and I have joked with him previously that he has not yet caught onto the fact that many of our Central and Tayside Ravens are now tree nesting!

In the mid-1990s I spent some long days on the hill with Patrick often in horrendous snowy conditions protecting an Eagle site near Balquhiddar known to be targeted by egg collectors. On one occasion in a blizzard Patrick and I witnessed what later turned out to be a notorious egg collector heading to the Eagle site far away from us and at high altitude, and disappearing from our view in the snow-storm. Gallingly, we learnt later that this person was raided by the police in the north of England and had robbed the Eagle nest on the day we were both out on the site.



Patrick receiving a SRSB-commissioned painting by Keith Brockie from Duncan Orr-Ewing to mark his retirement as SRSB Secretary.

I am privileged to have been out of the hill on a number of occasions with Patrick over many years and every trip has been a learning experience. There are not too many people who have had this benefit although I also know that Patrick has sometimes also taken out his wife Sue and three daughters. Sue Stirling-Aird has reminded me of a characteristic event typical of Patrick and both his dry sense of humour and commitment to raptor monitoring above all else. At Kippenross Patrick and Sue were hosting a group of Americans. Patrick had been out on the hill all day and the

expectant Americans were looking forward to hearing tales of Eagles and clambering around crags. When he arrived back and was asked to report, Patrick responded "I am afraid that I have negative information".

The list of very important roles Patrick has undertaken over many years as the SRSB Secretary is endless. He was a member of the UK Government's Raptor Working Group from 1995 to 2000. For those who are unaware this initiative was set up originally to tackle what was perceived by the then Conservative administration as "the raptor problem" and ended up meeting 25 times and making 25 recommendations for the enhancement of raptor conservation! Several officials singled out Patrick for special praise for his unstinting contributions to the group.

In my own role at RSPB Scotland, we used these report recommendations in the early 2000s to tackle the Government to do more for raptor conservation, and much of the progress that we see today is founded on that report. The formation of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, which Patrick was

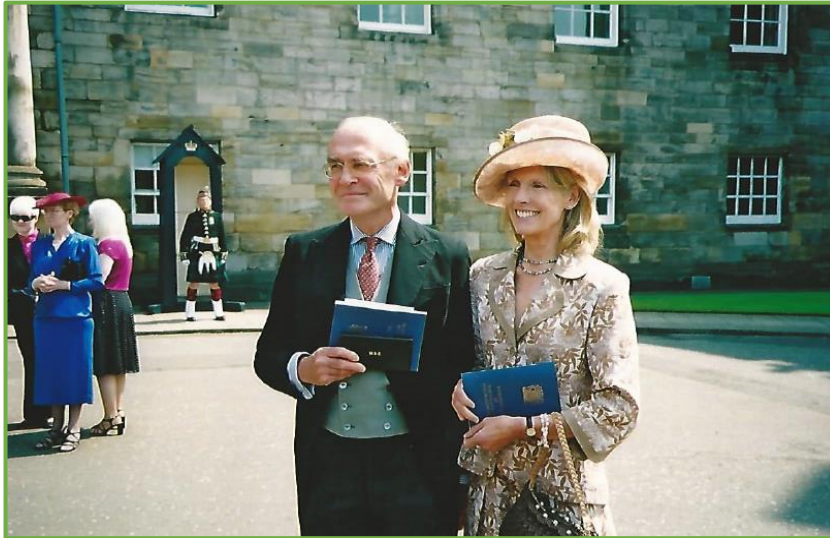
critical to forming, is one very good example of the report's outcome. Patrick reinforced the need of course for effective raptor monitoring. The DETR RWG Report was a seismic moment for raptor conservation in the UK and included the production of the SRSB document "Counting the Cost" which used SRSB data to highlight the continuing illegal persecution of raptors in Scotland, including Patrick's own long term Peregrine study in Central Scotland - "Human interference apparently affected about one fifth of the peregrine breeding population in central Scotland, 18% less young produced in the years 1981-1996".

In his role as SRSB Secretary, Patrick has represented the Scottish Raptor Study Groups on the Moorland Forum, the Police Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group and has been on the oversight group of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group since its inception 20 years ago. Patrick attends countless meetings representing the SRSB. His controlled persistence in defence of raptors, and against criminal persecution is unique, using his background training and professionalism as a solicitor to maximum effect. Over the years I have attended many meetings in my RSPB Scotland capacity, where Patrick has been representing the SRSB, and where raptor conservation has come under concerted attack. Usually our voices have been greatly outnumbered, and the atmosphere can be hostile. Patrick has steadfastly defended raptors and the conduct of SRSB fieldworkers. No matter how discordant the voices of the those in denial of raptor persecution, Patrick as calmly and robustly spoken up for raptors and raptor workers. Not a lover of the phrase 'balance', Patrick has very much followed the ethos of his early mentor Derek Ratcliffe in speaking up for raptors. He warmed to the closing lines of Derek Ratcliffe in his 2003 foreword to 'Birds of Prey in a Changing Environment': "Raptor enthusiasts will have to speak up, and assert their simple conviction that birds of prey are as important as gamebirds or homing pigeons."

Patrick has written numerous cogently argued, sometimes necessarily legally technical letters on our behalf to newspapers, magazines, Government Ministers, the Police and NatureScot to either defend or promote raptors. His detailed minutes and notes of meetings are unequalled and allow members to be kept comprehensively informed with what is happening within the political and conservation world. He carries around a large file of notes which usually means that whilst others are scrabbling around on their laptops Patrick can lay his fingers more immediately on the required information – and ammunition for a key point saliently made.

Whilst many of these meetings are often not pleasurable occasions, over the years it has gradually felt like we have been winning the argument, based largely on hard facts and reason, and also our passion for the birds. In these moments, Patrick's dry sense of humour can be a major tonic! We are on the cusp of securing grouse moor licensing in 2023 and this is testament to many decades of hard work by a number of key individuals, who can hold the ring and talk authoritatively about raptors. Patrick has played a totemic role in this.

Patrick has served time on the UK RSPB Council and has previously been a member of the RSPB Scottish Advisory Committee. He has been on the SWT Council and a member of the BTO Research & Surveys Committee. He is a Director of Natural Research which has done so much excellent scientific work on raptors.



We in the SRSB community and his family were all absolutely delighted when Patrick was awarded an MBE in 2005 in the New Year's Honours list for his services to wildlife conservation and this award was subsequently presented at a ceremony Holyrood Palace. This demonstrated the high regard with which he is held throughout the conservation and political world.

Patrick accompanied by his wife Susan, receiving his MBE at Holyrood Palace in 2005.

In summary, Patrick's reputation and influence as a 'volunteer' within the conservation world is second to none. We are truly indebted to him for his dedication to and involvement with the Scottish Raptor Study Group and more importantly for his own work on Peregrines, Golden Eagles and Ravens. He also seems to be the only person that I am aware of who has got the measure of Dave Anderson, or "David", as Patrick calls him.

Finally, whilst Patrick has stood down as SRSB Secretary, he continues to be an active member of both CSRSB and Tayside and Fife RSG. At our last CSRSB meeting Patrick handed over a few of his sites to others including myself, but remains our Species Coordinator for Golden Eagle and for Peregrine, and continues to monitor a number of sites even though now in his 80s. On a personal note, I am pleased to call Patrick a friend, and look forward to the next decade of raptor monitoring alongside this exceptional and inspirational individual!

Duncan Orr-Ewing (Chair, Central Scotland Raptor Study Group)

Appeal for photos

Our annual report covering both the 2021 & 2022 breeding seasons is currently in preparation. We would be very pleased to receive any photo contributions from either of the seasons for consideration for inclusion. Photos of raptors or indeed people monitoring raptors would be very welcome.

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