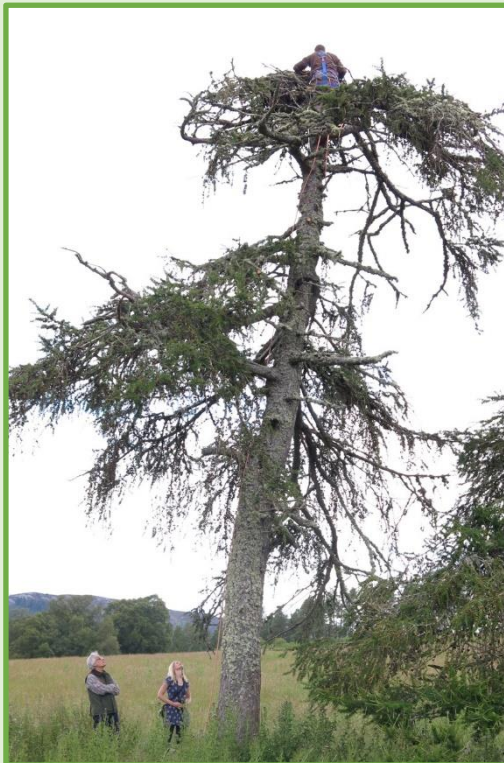


Scottish Raptor

Bringing you the latest news from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

This summer will mark my tenth year of working for the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, and this is the last newsletter that I will be compiling as the main face of the Scheme. While I will continue to work on behalf of the partnership for one day a week as Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator, the SRMS will shortly be recruiting for a new Scottish Raptor Monitoring Officer post to support me. This role will take on much of the day-to-day responsibilities, as I move to spend an increasing amount of time in a new role at BTO.



First time visiting an Osprey nest in July 2014 with members of HRSG (Adam Ritchie).

season!

In this issue you can read more about this year's Donald & Jeff Watson Raptor Award winner, Adam Ritchie. Adam was one of the first Scottish Raptor Study Group members that I met when I started at the SRMS back in 2014 and I have fond memories of joining Adam, Brian Etheridge (my predecessor at the Scheme) and a few other HRSG members to get up close to my first Osprey nest. Adam is just one example of the many amazing SRMS supporters who I will miss working with on a regular basis as I move into my new role at BTO.

In this issue you can also find out how you can take part in our data contributor survey. Please do get involved in this if you possibly can and get your responses in by the end of March. You can also find out more about our hot-off-the-press improvements to our online data entry system – SRMS Online. We also have some invited articles including an article updating on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) MOU and from the Volunteer Mountain Hare Survey appealing for more people to get involved with providing information to inform knowledge of Mountain Hare distributions.

To all our SRMS data contributors, have an enjoyable field

Amy Challis (Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator)

Please take part in our SRMS Data Contributor Survey

Off the back of the external review of the Scheme that NatureScot commissioned last year, the SRMS partners are busy working to try to deliver on the various recommendations from the review report. The report identified several priority actions to increase the impact of the Scheme in future, including (1) Extending monitoring coverage to support robust trends production, (2) Rolling out *Raptor Patch* and (3) Expanding the use of SRMS Online. The aim for all of these is to work on them collaboratively with all partners.

To help inform some difficult decisions that SRMG may have to make over the coming months we would really value feedback from SRMS data contributors. It is important that individual voices are heard, and to increase the collaborative approach that the external review recommended, we want to make sure that those SRMS data contributors that would like greater involvement in helping to shape the SRMS are given the opportunity to do so.

SRMG has put together a survey to try to collect views from as many contributors as possible on a broad range of topics. The survey covers things from understanding motivations for monitoring raptors, to helping the SRMS learn if there are things we could be doing better in terms of our communications.

We also need to understand the best ways to achieve some of these priority actions such as things to learn as we take *Raptor Patch* forward and how we go about expanding the use of SRMS Online. We really hope that some data contributors might want to have more involvement in developing some of the priority areas either on a 1:1 basis or as part of small working groups, and the survey asks you to indicate interest in these.

The survey can be completed electronically at this link:

<https://forms.gle/egNufnCDCTZSP3ki6>



The survey will remain open for responses until 31st March.

A huge thank you to those that have already responded!

SURVEY OF SRMS DATA CONTRIBUTORS

As the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) comes to the end of a three-year funding period we would really value feedback from our data contributors to help inform our direction of travel over the next three years.

All questions are optional. However, please make sure to click right through to the end and press 'Submit' so that we can log your response. The survey can be completed anonymously, but we would be grateful should you wish to share your name and contact details with us, so that we can get back in touch to discuss any feedback with you. Please DO share your details if you would like to get more involved in some of the opportunities presented below, or otherwise contact Amy Challis, Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator (srmc@bto.org), to express your interest.

Please submit your response **by 31st March**.

Thank you.

Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

srmc@bto.org [Switch accounts](#)

Not shared

Name (optional)

Your answer

Email Address (optional)

Your answer

Next

Page 1 of 7

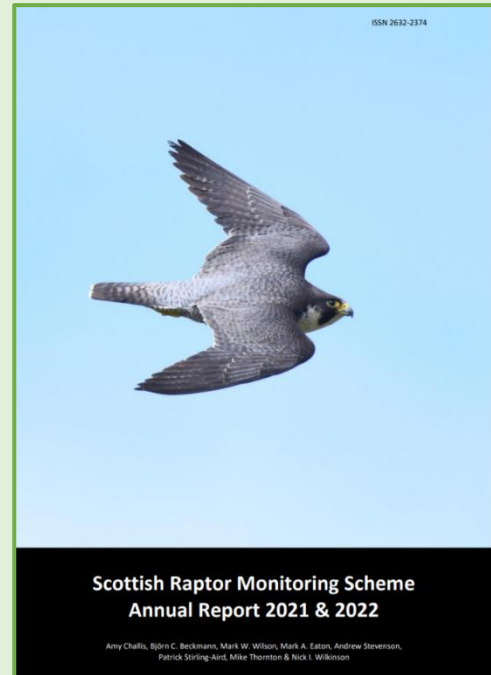
Clear form

SRMS Annual report

Our SRMS annual report, which reports on both the 2021 and 2022 breeding seasons was published on 1st March, and can be accessed on the SRMS website (<https://raptormonitoring.org/annual-report>) alongside the supplementary data tables.

Over the last six years, the SRMS has benefited from support from the SOC's Birds of Scotland Fund for the printing of these reports to share with stakeholders and our SRMS data contributors. We are extremely grateful to the Fund Committee for their generous support over this period.

The Birds of Scotland Fund is winding up and in line with many other organisations looking to be greener, and due to budget constraints, we are considering moving to a solely digital form of the SRMS Annual Report in future.



Winter Red Kite Roost Counts

On the 13/14 January 2024 the annual coordinated Red Kite winter roost count took place across Scotland as part of a wider census across the UK and Ireland, as well as throughout the Red Kite Range in Europe. This survey is now coordinated by LIFE EUOKITE <https://www.life-eurokite.eu/en/news.html> and the Swiss Ornithological Institute <https://www.vogelwarte.ch/de/>. We covered all known winter roosts. Apart from the Scottish islands, only Argyll, Lothian and Borders and South Strathclyde RSG areas do not have known Red Kite winter roosts, however as new breeding populations are becoming established in some of these areas, it is expected that that situation will change in the coming years.

In January 2024, a total of 1355 Red Kites were recorded at roosts in Scotland, representing a significant increase on the count at a similar time of year in 2023 of 1047 birds. The number of roosts has also increased from 33 to 36. The largest roost in Central Scotland/Tayside RSG area had a count of 250 birds (out of a total of 344 birds), however Dumfries and Galloway has the highest combined roost count total of 405 birds. Highland recorded 258 birds, Aberdeenshire 162 birds, and Angus 186 birds.

Most of the birds attending roosts are either juvenile or sub-adult non-breeding birds. The increased numbers of birds at Scottish roosts is likely to be explained by a number of factors. Last year 2023 was a good breeding season for Red Kites in some areas and as vole populations were high. Cold weather movements may have also played a role in moving birds south from the Highlands, and when it is known from previous wing tagging studies that a proportion of young Kites that have originally fledged from nests in the Highlands can winter in Central Scotland and Tayside. It is also possible that in some areas human persecution may have been reduced in the wider context of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill passing through the Scottish Parliament. Illegal poisoning cases seem to be gradually

declining in Scotland, which is welcome, and in the past Red Kites as scavengers have been particularly vulnerable to this activity.

Thank you to the SRSB members who coordinated for their areas and for all of the counters. The coordinators included Alison Philip/Andrea Goddard (Highland), Jenny Weston (Aberdeen), Ron Lawie/Mike Nicol (Angus), George Christie (Dumfries and Galloway)

Duncan Orr-Ewing (Central Scotland and Tayside & Fife RSGs).

SRMS funding

The partners are currently trying to agree an ambitious programme of work for the next three years and ensure that we have funding in place to support this. We have recently set up a funding sub-group to help us identify and hopefully ultimately secure some external funding for the Scheme to bolster that already provided by SRMS partners. The group will be meeting for the second time in early March.

Amy - Oot and about

Since our last issue I've enjoyed attending several SRSB spring meetings and presented at the Scottish Raptor Study Group conference last month, where we launched our survey for SRMS data contributors – see above.

The CMS Raptor MOU – update

Several key developments have taken place under the auspices of the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) [Raptor MOU](#). The third Meeting of Member States (MOS3) took place in [Dubai 3-6 July 2023](#). The MOU covers Africa and Eurasia, with 64 Signatories and five Cooperating Partners. Of these, representatives from 35 Signatory countries, as well as non-signatory countries, attended MOS3.

Much of the underlying work is undertaken by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) supported by the Secretariat. During the meeting, participants discussed the first [report](#) launched to assess the conservation status of migratory birds under the Raptors MOU. Over a third (34%) of the African-Eurasian migratory raptors are considered globally threatened or near-threatened on the IUCN Red List. 93% of vultures are of conservation concern (including eight Critically Endangered species) and half of the region's migratory eagles are at risk. The assessment revealed that the conservation status of these migratory raptors is deteriorating at a faster rate compared to the world's raptors and birds as a whole.

The Signatories of the MOU agreed on the necessity of regional strategies to conserve these birds and guide national efforts to protect them. They also agreed on the need to address threats posed by climate change and animal diseases, and emphasised the importance of regular assessments of trends in African and Eurasian migratory bird populations. Additionally, the meeting approved the largest

network of internationally important sites for migratory birds in Africa and Eurasia – more than 7,200 sites.

The meeting reviewed ongoing initiatives aimed at protecting species from threats, including the Multi-species Action Plan for the Conservation of African-Eurasian Vultures ([Vulture MsAP](#)), the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan ([SakerGAP](#)), the [International Single Species Action Plan for the Sooty Falcon](#), and the [Amur Falcon Conservation Initiative in Northeast India](#). The Signatories reaffirmed their commitments to addressing threats to migratory birds, such as illegal killing, trade, electrocution, and poisoning.

In addition to presentations by us on the [work of TAG](#) and its [future work plan](#), we had presentations from Scotland on the implementation of the SakerGAP by [Colin Galbraith and colleagues](#), and on the Egyptian Vulture Flyway Action Plan mid-term review by [Jenny Weston](#).

Following the MOS3, the TAG met on-line on [9th January 2024](#) to take work forward. Des stood down as chair (but remains a member), having served for ten years. Andre Botha was elected as chair, and Mátyás Prommer as vice-chair. The [renewed membership of TAG](#) straddles a great range of countries and raptor interests.

Some of the TAG members were involved in two key publications early in 2024. In [Nature Ecology and Evolution](#), a paper on African savanna raptors shows evidence of widespread population collapse and a growing dependence on protected areas. This work was led by TAG member Darcy Ogada and a former staff member of NatureScot, Phil Shaw, now a Research Fellow at the Centre for Biological Diversity, University of St Andrews. The second publication, [The Mid-Term Implementation Review of the Multi-Species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures \(Vulture MsAP\)](#), led by Andre Botha and Umberto, highlights the urgency of more action to sustain vultures across Africa and Europe. It reports on a) on-going serious concerns about intentional poisoning and hunting for belief-based use, bushmeat consumption, and trade, particularly in West Africa; b) global shift towards renewable energy sources, alongside the expansion of wind farm development, posing an escalating collision risk for vultures; and c) importance of recent interventions aimed at mitigating declines in food availability for vultures in certain parts of Europe.

The TAG meets again on [27th March](#) (on-line) when it will discuss the identification of biogeographic populations of the 94 species of migratory raptors covered by the MOU, and a potential analysis of trends in 'threat load' over time based on data and information BirdLife International has available on threats (using a [method used for Australian birds](#), led by Stephen Garnett). Both lines of work could greatly aid our understanding of the status of migratory raptors and therefore provide Raptor MoU Signatories with more accurate policy-relevant information.

We will keep you posted on developments.

Des Thompson and Umberto Gallo-Orsi

Desba.thompson@outlook.com

Umberto.galloorsi@un.org

SRMS Online: improvements, training opportunities and support

We have recently made several improvements to SRMS Online which we hope will be welcomed by existing SRMS Online users. You can find a complete list of new improvements on the SRMS website: <https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-online/latest-developments>

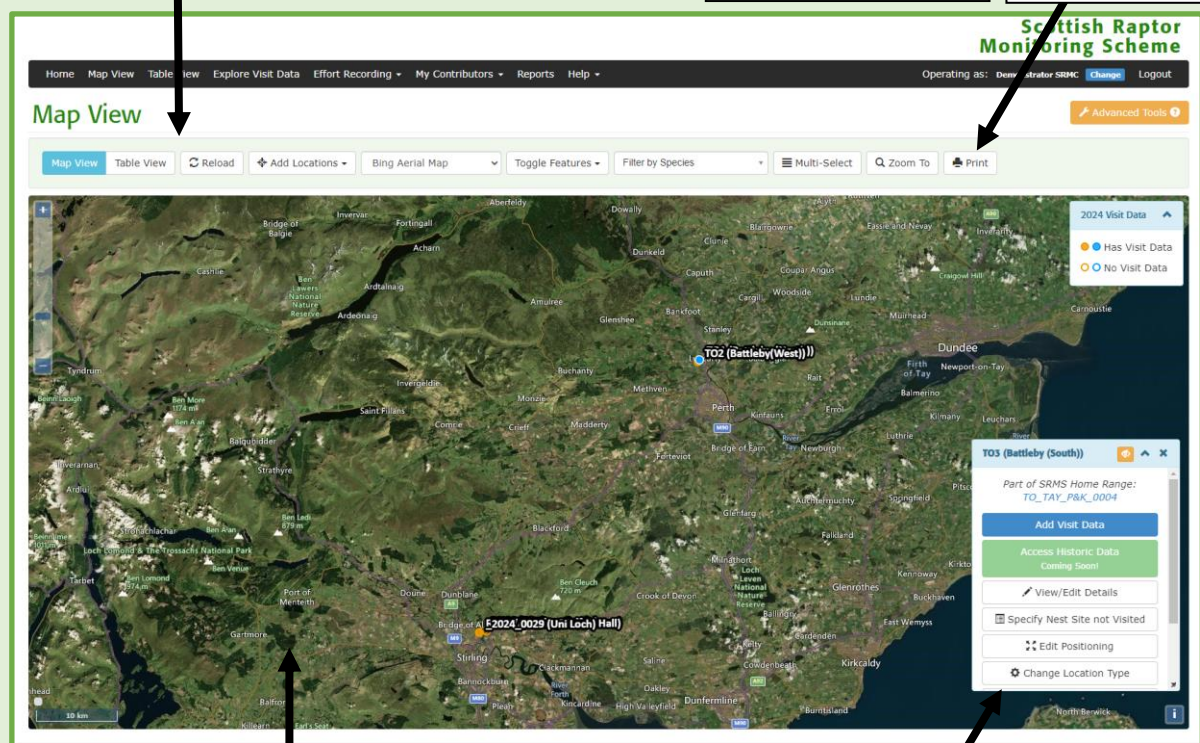
Among these improvements is a redesign of both Map View and List View (now renamed Table View) making the layout easier to work with and improve performance for people working on different screen sizes and devices. All the tools are now accessible via a single tool bar above the map/table or via a floating panel when you click on a location. There are several new tools too!

Single tool bar to replace several separate tool panels

Toggle on/off different map features including location labels, different types of locations and measurements

New tool that allows you to zoom in to a postcode or grid ref

New tool that allows you to print the map



Map options that you select such as your preferred background map, which locations are toggled on/off and the active coordinate system (OS grid vs lat/long) will be retained between sessions. This means for example, that if you prefer to always interact with the OS Survey Map rather than the Bing Aerial Map, if you select 'OS Survey Map' this will stay as the background until such time as you change it.

The floating panel which contains tools to interact with specific locations. Here you can easily 'Add Visit Data' and 'Specify Nest Site not Visited' for Nest Sites and 'Add Effort Recording' for Study Areas.

List View
renamed to Table
View

Single tool bar
to replace several
separate tool
panels

Home | Map View | **Table View** | Explore Visit Data | Effort Recording | My Contributors | Reports | Help

Operating as: Demonstrator SRMC | [Change](#) | [Logout](#)

**Scottish Raptor
Monitoring Scheme**

[Advanced Tools](#)

Table View

Map View | **Table View** | Reload | Locations | SRMS Home Ranges | Add Locations | Download Locations

Options	Location Code	Name	Grid Ref	Home Range	Species	County	Type	Habitat 1	Habitat 2	Nest Type	Site Type	Visibility
Add Visit Data Options	SRMC_BZ	East Pictlochry Raptor Patch	NN9459	Standalone sites		Perth & Kinross	Study Area	Other - Unknown	Other - Unknown			Demonstrator SRMC
Add Visit Data Options	19Mar2024	Edradour Wood	NN9546457125	Home range: BZ_TAY_P&K_1207	Buzzard	Perth & Kinross	Observation Site	Other - Unknown	Other - Unknown			Demonstrator SRMC
Add Visit Data Options	RN01	Airthrey Castle	NS8123096716	Home range: RN_CEN_STL_0023	Raven	Stirling	Nest Site	Other - Unknown	Other - Unknown	New self-built nest		Demonstrator SRMC
Add Visit Data Options	RN02	Airthry Golf Course	NS8158996627	Home range: RN_CEN_STL_0035	Raven	Stirling	Nest Site	Coniferous woodland - young semi-natural	Deciduous woodland - young	New self-built nest		Demonstrator SRMC
Add Visit Data Options	RN03	Andrew Stewart Hall	NS8062196567	Home range: RN_CEN_STL_0025	Raven	Stirling	Nest Site	Other - Unknown	Other - Unknown	New self-built nest		Demonstrator SRMC
Add Visit Data Options	TO1	Battleby (North)	NO0867629357	SRMS code: TO_TAY_P&K_0002	Tawny Owl	Perth & Kinross	Nest Site	Other - Unknown	Other - Unknown	Nest box		Demonstrator SRMC
Add Visit Data Options	TO2	Battleby (West)	NO0843429080	SRMS code: TO_TAY_P&K_0003	Tawny Owl	Perth & Kinross	Nest Site	Other - Unknown	Other - Unknown	Nest box		Demonstrator SRMC
Add Visit Data Options	TO3	Battleby (South)	NO0862029310	SRMS code: TO_TAY_P&K_0004	Tawny Owl	Perth & Kinross	Nest Site	Deciduous woodland - mature	Other - Unknown	Nest box		Demonstrator SRMC

showing 1 of 8 of 8 k

- ☐ Access Historic Data Coming soon!
- ☐ Specify Nest Site not Visited
- ☒ View/Edit Details
- ☐ Change Location Type
- ☐ Show on Map
- ☐ Delete

Easily 'Add Visit
Data' via this
new button

The floating panel which contains tools to interact with specific
locations. Here you can easily 'Specify Nest Site not Visited' for Nest
Sites and 'Add Effort Recording' for Study Areas.

We have also reorganised the Visit Log entry form and made several improvements that should make data entry more efficient, such as the 'Initials' field pre-populating based on the person entering the data and the 'Location' field pre-populating based on the location that was selected to "Add Visit Data" to.

We are also very pleased to be making available for the first time the ability to record reasons for failure of breeding attempts and any evidence to support this in a standardised way which will be important in our work to report temporal and spatial patterns in causes of failure.

New tooltips ('?') added throughout to guide you

Renamed tabs at top of form and removed the 'Habitat' tab

New 'View on map' button to allow you to see the mapped Home Range

Comments box turns blue to show when information has been added

New Visit Log

Species: TO TAWOW Tawny Owl

Home Range: TO_TAY_FIM_0002 Tawny Owl (SRMS code: TAY_FIM_0002)

[View on map](#) [Find by nest site](#)

Specify Nest Sites Not Visited

Clone fields

Settings

All monitoring data relating to the same Home Range should be recorded in a single Visit Log for that breeding season – this means that visit data relating to alternate Nest Sites within a Home Range or for successive breeding attempts at one or more Nest Sites within a given Home Range are recorded in the same Visit Log.

Date	Time	Initials	Observation Method	Location	Occupancy	Status Codes	Eggs	Young	Nesting attempt	Time by nest		
							Live	Dead	Live	Dead	Fledged	
dd/mm/yyyy	00:00			T01 (Battle ...)	Occupancy							
+ Add more details												
Add row below												

Initials will default to person entering the data (but can be overridden)

Location will default to location clicked on to 'Add Visit Data' (but can be overridden)

Add up to 5 status codes in a one and easily search for status codes based on words likely found in the description

Add extra details including counts/ages/sexes of birds, types and freshness of field signs such as plucks and causes and evidence(s) of breeding failure

Thank you to both Andrew Joys and Hayden Woods, both developers on BTOs Information Services Team, for all their hard work in delivering these improvements – Hayden for developing what you see on your screen and Andrew for all the crucial background work behind the scenes which means that all your data is successfully banked in the database.

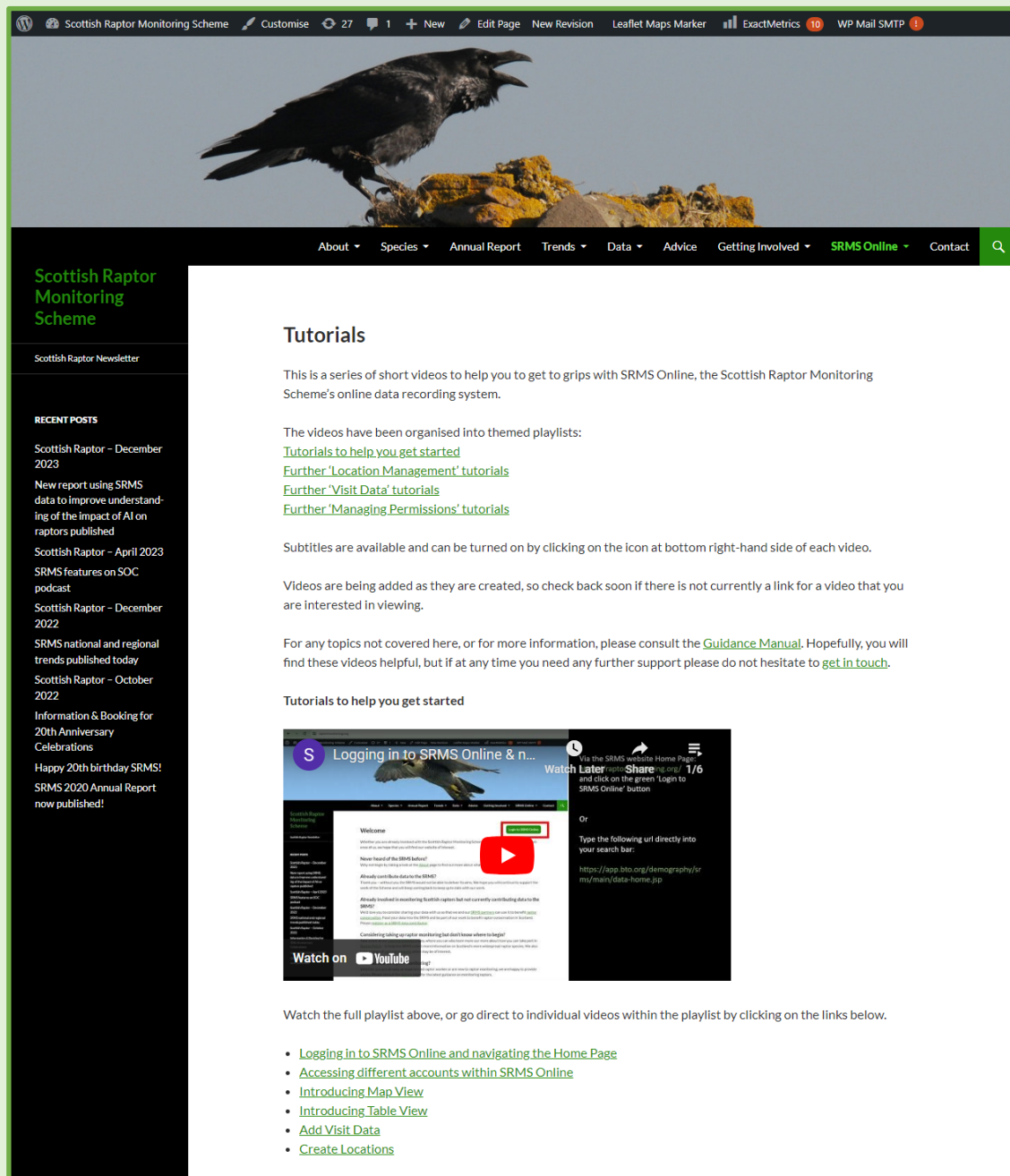
A huge thanks to all recorders who are already on board with using SRMS Online and are helping to develop and improve it through getting in touch to provide helpful feedback and suggestions. There are further improvements which we would still like to deliver if the appropriate funding can be found.

If you do not yet have an SRMS Online account but would like to give it a try this year, then please get in touch for help getting set up.

If you are new to SRMS Online, please consider joining a “SRMS Online for Beginners” training course. Please keep an eye out for dates on the SRMS events page - <https://raptormonitoring.org/getting-involved/events>

I have also recently refreshed tutorials on SRMS Online available on YouTube. I have tried to break SRMS Online down into bitesize chunks – so hopefully helpful to anyone wanting to get to grips with SRMS Online at a pace which suits them. Please visit:

<https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-online/tutorials>



Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme

Scottish Raptor Newsletter

RECENT POSTS

- Scottish Raptor – December 2023
- New report using SRMS data to improve understanding of the impact of AI on raptors published
- Scottish Raptor – April 2023
- SRMS features on SOC podcast
- Scottish Raptor – December 2022
- SRMS national and regional trends published today
- Scottish Raptor – October 2022
- Information & Booking for 20th Anniversary Celebrations
- Happy 20th birthday SRMS! SRMS 2020 Annual Report now published!

Tutorials

This is a series of short videos to help you to get to grips with SRMS Online, the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme's online data recording system.

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](#)

Subtitles are available and can be turned on by clicking on the icon at bottom right-hand side of each video.

Videos are being added as they are created, so check back soon if there is not currently a link for a video that you are interested in viewing.

For any topics not covered here, or for more information, please consult the [Guidance Manual](#). Hopefully, you will find these videos helpful, but if at any time you need any further support please do not hesitate to [get in touch](#).

Tutorials to help you get started

Watch on YouTube

Watch Later

Share

1/6

Use the SRMS website Home Page and click on the green 'Login to SRMS Online' button

Or

Type the following url directly into your search bar:

<https://app.bto.org/demography/srms/main/data-home.jsp>

Watch the full playlist above, or go direct to individual videos within the playlist by clicking on the links below.

- [Logging in to SRMS Online and navigating the Home Page](#)
- [Accessing different accounts within SRMS Online](#)
- [Introducing Map View](#)
- [Introducing Table View](#)
- [Add Visit Data](#)
- [Create Locations](#)

I'm also in the process of updating an FAQ page (<https://raptormonitoring.org/srms-online/faqs>).

If you are an existing SRMS Online user and ever need a little bit of help, then please don't hesitate to get in touch, by email or phone. I am always happy to arrange a slot to meet virtually to help get you back on track.

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 2024 the award was presented to Adam Ritchie of Highland Raptor Study Group, delivered at the most recent Scottish Raptor Study Group Conference where the award was presented.

Below is the citation having been proposed by the Golden Eagle monitoring team for Affric-Strathconon SPA.

Adam has had a lifelong interest in nature, but his focus on raptors began in earnest in adulthood. While working for the museums service in Leicester he would see dead raptors sent from further north for taxidermy and later use in collections. Amazed by the beauty of birds such as Peregrines when seen close-to in this way, Adam hankered to experience living raptors in the wild. His thoughts turned north.

The chance to start living the dream of watching wild birds of prey came when he got a job in the Dundee Museums service in 1970. Over the next 28 years, he would work his way up to become head of that service. But from the outset, the countryside beyond the city, including the glens between the Cairngorms and the lowlands of Angus, became his go-to place. Peregrines and Golden Eagles were the two principal species he started monitoring, often working in combination with Alec Rollo and Mike Nicoll. Doing this could involve working a full day at the 'office' then heading for the hills at five in the evening to drive out to begin fieldwork on territories and nests.



Adam Ritchie being presented with the Donald & Jeff Watson Raptor award by Chris Rollie at the recent Scottish Raptor Study Group conference (Vanessa Halhead/Watson).

In those days, raptor workers were few and widely scattered. Monitoring of Golden Eagles and some other raptors in Dundee and East Perthshire was through individual enthusiasts, including those already mentioned and Keith Brockie. There was a similar situation in Aberdeen through Rab (Skitts) and Stuart Rae, Graham Rebecca and several others. The chance to start something more coordinated came after Adam contacted Adam Watson, who invited the Dundee group to a meeting in his ITE office in Banchory to meet the Aberdeen group. It was agreed that a North-East Raptor Study Group (NERSG) should be formed under Adam Watson's guidance. The primary reason for the foundation of the NERSG, from which Tayside RSG split off in due course, was to ensure data was collected from all sites of Golden Eagle and Peregrine using a standard methodology and that an annual report was produced. This prevented duplication of visits and allowed dissemination of information.



Adam Ritchie (Brian Etheridge).

NERSG was the first RSG established in Scotland, albeit an informal one, and was likely to have been the initial seed of an idea that sprouted the many shoots that are the current Scottish RSGs. For several years into the 1980s, the original informal NERSG worked collaboratively, meeting twice a year at Banchory and submitting raptor monitoring data to the then NCC Scotland. It then morphed into a formal regional NERSG and a Tayside RSG.

Then, as now, Adam was a dedicated and careful observer, devoting huge amounts of volunteer effort to documenting the fortunes of raptors. As part of this, he

could share a passion for these birds with colleague Keith Brockie, who worked for the Dundee Museums service with Adam as his boss for a few years before becoming a full-time freelance artist. Keith says that Adam was a great influence in the late 70s early 80s with raptor monitoring in the Angus Glens, especially Golden Eagle and Peregrine falcon. He was “always willing to impart his great knowledge of home ranges and traditional nest sites gained from many hours in the field.”

Moving from Dundee after nearly thirty years to the southwest of England put a temporary damper on Adam’s raptor fieldwork. He says that he found it ‘difficult to get into’ the established local raptor study scene, but his commitment to birds of prey stayed undimmed.

Returning north early in the millennium and settling after a couple of years in upper Strathnairn - where he’s lived ever since - has been a boon for Highland raptor monitoring and wider bird work. From his house, Adam can go a short way to help as a voluntary warden for the RSPB at Loch Ruthven. Crucially, from an HRSRG point of view, he can walk out to moors and hills to monitor Hen Harriers or travel much more widely in the north to keep track of many species of birds of prey.



Adam Ritchie (Stuart Rae).

And what a list of monitored species that is! It’s hard to think of a Highland-breeding raptor that Adam hasn’t helped to study: Red Kite, Hen Harrier and Osprey with Brian Etheridge; Merlin; Peregrine; Honey-buzzard; Goshawk; and notably, huge numbers of hours spent each year in watching Golden Eagle territories in the Affric-Strathconon SPA for Golden Eagles. He does this as part of a small team – Carol Miller, Doug Mainland, Vanessa Halhead/Watson, Ronan Watson and Alice and Kenny Taylor – some of whom came together originally through Vanessa’s

encouragement more than 15 years ago, following the untimely passing of Jeff Watson.

Adam is a great enthusiast and champion of younger folk. He's very willing to share his knowledge and skills with all, and helpful and encouraging to newcomers. One benefit of this for co-workers who are less tech savvy is that having mastered SRMS online he has mentored others about it. A keen photographer, he puts this skill to good use in raptor monitoring, including ID of individuals and reading of bird rings.

Although he very much appreciates Golden Eagles, Adam says that his favourite bird of all is the Hen Harrier. That also seems very appropriate, given the link between eagles, harriers and Jeff and Donald Watson. Adam is the salt of the raptor monitoring earth: someone who has devoted much of his adult life to careful fieldwork and (as anyone who knows him will attest) to meticulous notetaking and record keeping. Hugely dedicated and passionate about raptor monitoring and conservation, Adam always gives 100 per cent. He does this with quiet enjoyment and without being someone who pushes himself forward or shows off about what he does. He also has levels of energy in the hills that could be envied by people half his age.



Adam Ritchie (Brian Etheridge).

For over half a century of raptor studies, including at the very start of the Scottish groups, Adam more than merits national recognition as someone whose contributions, still continuing, have been huge.

"I had the pleasure of joining Adam and many of the Golden Eagle monitoring team for Affric-Strathconon SPA on one of their monitoring trips in the summer of 2022 when pulling together a video to mark the SRMS 20th anniversary. You can [watch the video](#) again and hear Adam sharing his passion for raptor monitoring".

Amy Challis (SRMC)

Get involved with the Volunteer Mountain Hare Survey

One of the benefits of volunteering for a project such as the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme is that it gets participants out in the wild to enjoy the incredible natural beauty of Scotland. This can bring you into contact with all the wildlife populating the landscape – not just the raptors your monitoring is focussed on! There may well have been times when you've been carrying out raptor surveys in montane and moorland habitats and have been privileged to catch a glimpse of one of Scotland's most iconic and elusive mammals – the Mountain Hare.

In our vast and remote landscapes such sightings are gold-dust for those seeking to find out more about mountain hares, in order to inform conservation of this beautiful native species. By recording just a bit of extra information when you are out surveying upland raptors, or when walking for pleasure in the hills, you could help the Volunteer Mountain Hare Survey (VMHS) to improve our knowledge of Mountain Hare populations in Scotland. Information from areas where you AREN'T encountering Mountain Hares could be particularly valuable. Learning about distributions is as much about understanding where animals aren't as about finding out where they are!



Mountain Hare (Sarah Kelman)

The easiest way to contribute to the VMHS is simply to keep a record of what you see when out on fieldwork, using this [form](#) to record whether you saw Mountain Hares (or signs of their presence), how many there were, and the approximate area and timing.

For those of you willing to spend a bit more time to provide more detailed information, you might consider carrying out a formal transect survey of mammals and birds on your 'route in' to do raptor fieldwork. For those of you who have taken part in the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), our 'Hare Rambles' follow very similar methods, but can be done along any route of the observer's choosing. You can record and submit data for these transects using the Mammal Mapper app, or on paper survey forms. More information about the relevant survey methods can be found [here](#).

The reason that any information you can provide about Mountain Hares is so valuable is that, like many of our upland specialists, they are difficult to monitor. This is partly due to the difficulties of recruiting volunteers to carry out surveys in many of the rugged and remote landscapes they occupy. From this perspective, it makes sense to try to get information from people like yourselves who are already spending time in these areas. The lack of surveyors is compounded by the fact that Mountain Hare populations (like those of the Field Vole, *Microtus agrestis*) naturally cycle through peaks and troughs across large areas. This means that year-to-year changes in numbers are difficult to interpret, making good survey data crucial to monitoring Mountain Hares.

With this in mind, 2020 saw a number of organisations (British Trust for Ornithology, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, Mammal Society and NatureScot) come together to form the Volunteer Mountain Hare Survey (VMHS). This aims to improve our understanding of Mountain Hare populations in Scotland by engaging with various groups of biological recorders, wildlife enthusiasts, and outdoor users to enlist their help to survey this species. Because many other upland birds and mammals in Scotland are also data-deficient, VMHS partners are keen to capitalise on opportunities to record other mammals and birds during surveys for Mountain Hares. VMHS therefore offers several survey formats, with participants able to record both hares and other species encountered on surveys via a dedicated mobile app or on paper recording forms. VMHS surveys can be done at any time of year, but late-winter and early-spring surveys are particularly valuable as counts at this time of year provide a better reflection of breeding populations. Also, many hares don't moult into their summer coats

until mid-April, so in the absence of spring snows, the contrast of their white coats against the background vegetation makes them easier to see in early spring than at most other times of year.

Once collated and verified, VMHS data are combined with other relevant data sources (including night-time transect counts, BBS and other Mammal Society surveys) to improve our understanding of Mountain Hare populations. In turn, this will help government and NGOs to make decisions about where to target conservation action for this species, and to find out what kinds of conservation management are most effective.

You can find out more about this project from the first year report [here](#), and about the different kinds of surveys you can take part in [here](#). If you have any questions, you can send them to mountain.hare@bto.org.

MOUNTAIN HARES IN SCOTLAND

Mountain Hares (*Lepus timidus*) are Britain's only native lagomorph (hares and rabbits). Within Britain, Mountain Hares are native exclusively to the Scottish uplands, though small populations are found in northern England. The closely related Irish Hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*) is restricted to the island of Ireland. Mountain Hare is an ecologically important species in upland Scotland, impacting other species through its roles as a heather-specialist herbivore, as a reservoir for tick-borne infections of other upland mammals and birds such as 'louping ill', and as an important source of food for some bird and mammal predators, particularly Golden and White-tailed Eagles.

Concerns about the UK's Mountain Hare population, particularly in Scotland, are reflected in the species' Near Threatened status in the Mammal Society's IUCN-compliant Red List (2020). Among the issues relevant to Mountain Hare conservation are reduced quantity and quality of habitat due to changes in land use, uncertainty over the sustainability of hunting and population control of Mountain Hares on some upland estates, and inter-breeding and competition for resources with their more numerous, non-native cousins, Brown Hares (*Lepus europaeus*). These issues, and a lack of reliable data on their population status, led to Mountain Hares becoming legally protected under Scottish law on 1st March 2021.

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