



Hen Harrier Action: January 2022 newsletter



Dear reader,

Happy New Year and welcome to our January newsletter. We're really looking forward to 2022. Although things are as uncertain as ever on the Covid front, we have Skydancer Day and our nest cameras to look forward to and are very much hoping for the return of on the ground Hen Harrier Day events all over the land.

Sunnyside School Awarded Nature Champions of the Decade

In November 2021, pupils and staff at Sunnyside Primary School were awarded the prestigious prize of Nature Champions of the Decade at the RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards Ceremony.

Sunnyside is a small primary school in the heart of Glasgow that packs a huge punch when it comes to raising awareness about environmental issues, implementing sustainable living, challenging government policy and inspiring others to make changes to protect the future of the planet. In 2019, the school won the RSPB Nature of Scotland Youth and Education Award. The pupils and staff at the school have worked tirelessly over the years to introduce campaigns to support Scotland's wildlife and wild habitats. These have included the #NaeStrawAtAw campaign to reduce the use of single-use plastic and the #DrainCampaign to reduce the amount of litter entering our drains.

The pupils and staff have been great champions for hen harriers and eagles, raising awareness of illegal raptor persecution and challenging the government with their #DareToSoar campaign. This is a school that instigates real and lasting change by putting conservation at the core of their ethos and curriculum. It creates citizens of the future who will implement all they have learned to help build a more sustainable world.

We caught up with some of the P7 Ocean Defender pupils to offer our congratulations and ask what this award means to them:

“It’s really cool to get this award! It’s a great honour looking back and seeing what a small school can achieve in a big world.”

“We believe we have made a real difference in raising awareness through our campaigns and class lessons and in defending nature by our actions.”

“We hope that, in the next decade, more people will come to understand why it is important to protect our world – and to realise that every little voice and every little action really can make the difference.”

Congratulations Sunnyside, we can’t wait to see what you will do in the next decade and hope others continue to be inspired by your actions.

Monitoring winter roosts



So much valuable scientific work is undertaken by volunteers. Adrian Samuels has been a residential volunteer at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen in Norfolk since April 2021; in January 2022 he is moving to RSPB Insh Marshes in Scotland to take up another residential volunteer position. Here he tells us about his experience of monitoring a marsh harrier winter roost.

“I am one of two resident volunteers at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen

nature reserve. I have been working with the wardens and the visitor experience team at the reserve over the last eight months. As part of our learning, we perform the hen harrier winter roost survey for the BTO. I was obviously very excited to be asked to monitor such an important and majestic species that is so endangered in our country. On the third Sunday of every month, from October through to March, we go out and count the birds coming into roost in the fen. The survey is mainly for hen harriers, but it also asks that we count marsh harriers and make notes of any other raptors we see. At

Strumpshaw, we mainly have marsh harriers, but the BTO make it clear that nil counts of hen harriers are especially important with these birds disappearing around the country. So, while we may not see any hen harriers at our roost, I am glad that we are contributing to a survey that may help the work needed to keep this magical bird in our country.

So far, we have been out for the October, November and December counts. For the October count, we headed to Fen Hide about an hour before the sun set at 6pm. We had decided this was a good place as it has a good view of the roosting areas in the fen and the birds tend to fly in from behind it – as it gets darker you can still see silhouettes as they fly past. We had done some practice counts so we knew the current roost size to be about 10 marsh harriers. We counted eight marsh harriers coming in that evening. It was good to start with lower numbers, less chance to lose count and more time to identify each one. I was surprised by how often they were mobbed by crows. They would mostly just fly on, weaving a bit to avoid them but rarely extending their talons.



For the November count, we were joined by one of the wardens so that he could help us prepare for a marsh harrier roost event we were running. By this time more birds had joined the roost so we knew the count would be higher. Sunset was at about 4pm so we headed out to Fen Hide at about 3pm. There were two or three marsh harriers already there when we arrived, so we followed them with binoculars to look for distinguishing features and to record the sex. We were also looking out for the tell-tale white rump or barred tail of the hen

harrier. At the beginning, this was not too hard but as we lost the light it became harder and harder, until the very end when they became silhouettes. It also became tricky to keep track of how many were coming in and to combine using binoculars with a narrower view and scanning without binoculars to watch the whole sky. The harriers occasionally fly up in groups before settling for the night so we try to scan the roost area often with binoculars to count how many we can see at once. They only did this a few times on this occasion, and I think we saw 10 in the air at one point. Unfortunately, we couldn't see any hen harriers so a zero was recorded for the hen harrier count that evening. Our total marsh harrier count was 30. We later heard that another volunteer had counted 36 leaving the roost at sunrise the next day. Some may have slipped in without us noticing or arrived before we got there and immediately settled in for the night. A few days later we also heard that someone had reported seeing a hen harrier from Fen Hide, so fingers were crossed for the next survey.

For the December survey, we went out shortly after 2.30pm but it was not until around 3pm that we started to see the first marsh harriers arrive. Not many came in to begin with and we were a little worried but suddenly about eight arrived at once. The crows didn't know which one to harass. In the end we counted about 18 coming into roost, a bit of a drop from the 30 we had seen in November. Again no hen harrier, so this was another nil count for the BTO. Luckily for me, I had recently visited NWT Hickling a little north of Strumpshaw and seen a male hen harrier there. Although it was quite distant, it was a joy to see its ghostly form heading over the reeds and scrub, and a great addition to my previous two sightings of this species. The first occurred when I was with my mum at Fingringhoe in Essex: a large female hen harrier launched herself out of an arable field next to the reserve. For the second sighting, I was in a car with my dad on the Isle of Mull in Scotland when we saw a silvery grey male hen harrier gliding low along a valley. Both wonderful and exciting experiences that have been burned into my memory. Hopefully in my move to Scotland I will get even closer views."

Hen Harrier Action news



Following our successful fundraiser last month, where we managed to raise over £11,000 (a big thank you to everyone who donated!), we can now begin to think about how these funds will be spent. Currently we are liaising with RSPB Investigations to order three satellite tags to be fitted to hen harrier chicks in the 2022 nesting season. The number of tags is limited to three to ensure we have sufficient funds left to cover potential ongoing data costs. Once fitted (hopefully to at least one chick featured on one of our nestcams), the RSPB will monitor the data transmitted from these

chicks on our behalf and provide us with regular updates on their whereabouts and health. It's exciting to think we will be contributing to the ongoing scientific understanding of this species and preventing (the tags can sometimes act as a deterrent) or detecting their persecution if the data shows that to have sadly occurred.

We are also now able to fund new sets of camera equipment for two nestcams in 2022, hopefully improving upon the live footage from our 2021 Scottish nest and organising another, possibly in Wales. There are relatively few nest sites in England that are appropriate or suitable for a nest camera, unfortunately. This is mainly due to the low population of breeding hen harriers in England and high proportion of intensively-kept heather moorland, the hen

harrier's favoured habitat. We should be able to update you further as to the progress of these plans on our 2022 online Skydancer Day - fingers crossed that everything will be in place by then! And we will update you via this newsletter and our social media platforms too.

Thank you again to all those who contributed to our nest camera crowdfunder. Unfortunately, there was a technical glitch in the way the fundraiser was set up which meant that you were not invited to sign a Gift Aid declaration. If you are a UK taxpayer and haven't already done so, we would be very grateful if you would now **sign a Gift Aid declaration** by going to our [website](#) and completing the form. It will only take a couple of minutes and it will increase the value of your donation to the charity by 25%.

Finally, we're looking for **help with our website** – is there anyone out there with **Joomla!** experience who'd like to lend us a hand? If so, please contact us on at info@henharrierday.uk.

News roundup

Natural England has published its latest [report](#) on hen harrier monitoring, tagging and satellite tracking. It focuses on the breeding success of hen harriers in England – 31 breeding attempts, with 24 pairs successfully fledging 84 chicks. Sadly, it also reports five satellite-tagged birds as having stopped transmitting. The bodies of two of these birds have been recovered, implying death from natural causes pending the results of a post mortem. Nothing is said about the other three, whose last transmissions were from the North Pennines and Northumberland. And, of course, successful breeding is only the start of the story and should not be the only measure of success. How many of these newly fledged hen harriers will survive to raise their own chicks?

The Langholm Community phase 2 buyout received a £500,000 donation in December – getting them significantly closer to their £3.3million target. Their [crowdfunder](#) has now reached nearly £60,000. They have until May 2022 to reach their goal

The RSPB is asking for our help in monitoring where peatlands are being burnt. If you see any burning when out on the hills, please report it via their [website](#).

Answers to December's cryptic clues

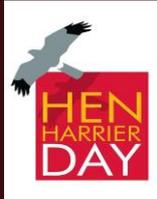
Here are the answers to the cryptic clues in December's newsletter – we hope you enjoyed puzzling them out.

1. Eats dragonflies in spare time? HOBBY
2. Crow found in four avengers' gatherings. RAVEN

3. Led back round semi-aquatic mammal found high on mountain. DOTTEREL
4. Fool gets point eventually. TWITE
5. Consumed in summer, linnets beware. MERLIN
6. A weather puzzle for migrant. WHEATEAR
7. Communist's complaint. RED GROUSE
8. Like a rolling conversation. STONECHAT
9. Chicken takes off vertically. HEN HARRIER
10. A tramping error on mountain top. PTARMIGAN

Support us: support hen harriers

Many thanks to all the supporters who have once again been so generous in supporting our work. As ever, the encouragement it gives us is at least equal to the monetary value of the donation. So we always welcome donations, especially new regular contributions. To make a donation, click [here](#), (if eligible please click the Gift Aid box too).



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