

Hen Harrier Action: March/April 2022 newsletter

Dear subscriber,

Welcome to our spring 2022 newsletter. As winter gives way to spring (although the weather seems a bit confused), we have exciting things to look forward to: Skydancer Day, two nest cameras and real-life Hen Harrier Day events. If you'd be interested in organising one (an event, that is), but are not sure what it might involve, we're here to help.

Tarras Valley Nature Reserve is One Year Old!



It is one year since the 5,200 acres of the Tarras Valley were legally transferred into community ownership. Tarras Valley Nature Reserve (TVNR), as it is now known, comprises a variety of habitats including ancient wood, wetland, meadows and river valley but is probably most famous for its upland moor which was managed as a driven grouse moor by its previous owner, the Duke of Buccleuch.

A priority for the newly established management team is to develop a programme of ecological restoration that will create a mosaic of biodiverse habitats which will in turn support a wide range of wildlife such as otter, black grouse, red squirrel and the iconic hen harrier.

At the time of writing, a pair of hen harriers have just arrived back on the moor, with visitors to the reserve over the TVNR's birthday weekend, on 26 March, being treated to fantastic views of the male harrier sky dancing across the moorland.

If all goes to plan it will soon be possible to monitor the progress of the breeding TVNR hen harriers from the comfort of your sitting room. TVNR has teamed up with Hen Harrier Action, who will be supplying a nestcam that will relay live footage to both charities' websites over the summer.

As in previous years, some of the young harriers will be fitted with satellite transmitters which will enable the birds to be tracked once they have fledged from the nest.

TVNR is also planning to host its very own Hen Harrier Day in August. Hopefully, by that time the Langholm community will be celebrating having raised a further £2.2 million and will have purchased the remaining 5,300 acres of the Tarras Valley estate.

With just two months left until the second buyout deadline, the fundraiser is currently standing at 125K. There is still time to donate! To find out more or to donate to the buyout campaign, please visit the [gofundme page](#).

My hen harrier moment

By Gill Lewis, author of Sky Dancer and Eagle Warrior

Emotional Memory - Landscapes of the Mind

Elusive and mythical. Ghost of the moor. I had heard first-hand accounts of the hen harrier, a bird to strike awe in those fortunate enough to see them. Yet they eluded me as I searched for them across English driven grouse moors while I researched for my book Sky Dancer. I still could not find any on the grouse moors of Scotland. Yet it was during a trip to Arran at the end of lockdown in 2020 that I saw them for the first time. Away from the fire-scarred moors and grouse butts, two were rising up above a ridge, their silhouettes dancing against a pale grey sky. It was a consuming moment of wonder, hitting hard into the limbic system of my brain. It felt as if this vast landscape could not be whole without them; as if the sighting of them had also helped to complete part of the jigsaw of me. And yet, it made me think about those people who do not share the same awe and wonder at these birds: the people for whom the sight of these birds must surely provoke emotions of hate, fear and revulsion... those individuals who seek to remove them from the landscape by shooting, trapping or poisoning them, or by brood 'management', all for the sake of producing game birds for profit. Are these minds devoid of wonder and empathy with the beauty of the wild world?

Is it possible that even the most barren landscapes of the brain are capable of change? Can they accommodate the hen harrier? In an era of diminishing wildlife, we need to rewild the world. But maybe the answer to recovery of the hen harrier requires the rewilding of minds – allowing the seeds of change to take root and grow

www.gilllewis.com, Twitter @gilllewis

How to organise a Hen Harrier Day

Aaaah, springtime! Isn't it glorious? It's that time of year when the garden bursts into life once more, the birds build their nests, blossom erupts on the trees and the insects begin to buzz. For us humans our minds turn to the year ahead, not just in the garden – mowing the lawn or digging that oft-dreamed of pond – but also planning our own activities for the year ahead. For me, as a hen harrier enthusiast, this means planning for the yearly Hen Harrier Day events which occur on or around the weekend before 12 August (the Inglorious 12th). Whether it's simply attending one or planning to stage one, I always make an effort to support the cause. Over the past two years it's been different of course, because of Covid-19 restrictions, and events moved online. But now

we can take those tentative steps back to organising real-life, actual events and folk are raring to meet up again. This year Hen Harrier Action are hoping to support a number of Hen Harrier Day events. From the Highlands of Scotland, Wales to the South of England there will hopefully be an event near you to attend. If there isn't, or you would like to put on an event of your own then we are here to help you do just that. Hen Harrier Action can offer support, materials and advice and there are even funds available to cover things like venue hire or speaker fees or expenses. Events don't have to be large and conference-style but can be simple information stalls or an evening of talks. Maybe a family day with children's activities? We are flexible and will try to support your ideas, however different.

In 2017 and 2018, I organised two large events in the Highlands of Scotland. I was surprised how easy it was to plan them and how much support I got from others. After booking a suitable venue (my first was at a community centre and the second at a hotel), it was relatively straightforward in terms of persuading people to come and speak. The most difficult part was knowing who to ask but I blasted an email to all the well-known people from the conservation sector, raptor campaigners, local politicians, progressive landowners who have embraced change and even TV wildlife presenters. I soon filled all six slots with interesting speakers, set up a running order and began to put the word out on social media for people to attend. A few friends also volunteered to help greet people at the door, sell merchandise, organise the car park and serve refreshments, and they were a godsend! I arranged for a few organisations to set up their own stalls within the event too. The day itself was a buzz of activity, but essentially, because I had planned the running order well, I didn't have much to do except sit back and enjoy the talks, happy in the knowledge that I had, for another year, helped spread awareness of the ongoing issues around hen harriers and other upland wildlife.

I enjoy doing 'my bit' and feel it is important to champion the causes that you feel passionate about. If you do too, and want to help then please do get in touch and we can chat about how you can do 'your bit', whatever that may be. We will support you all the way.

Let's chat! Email us on: info@henharrierday.uk.

Hen Harrier Action news

Save the date: Skydancer Day, 14 May!



We're thrilled to announce that Megan McCubbin and Indy Greene will be hosting this year's Skydancer Day!

Join us for a morning of live chat, expert interviews, inspiring creations, news and short films in celebration of the hen harrier and more. As our grey males begin to dance above the heather, author Gill Lewis will be launching the process to find this year's Young Wild Writer.



We'll transport you to Glen Feshie to take a look at their rewilding work, and we'll bring you details of our latest nestcam project. Thanks to your incredible generosity, we are able to install two cameras at hen harrier nests this year, one in Wales and one in Scotland, and fund the tagging of three chicks, to be fitted and monitored by the RSPB. Get the date in your diaries! Details to come. Follow us on social media for updates:

- Twitter: @HHDAYUK
- Facebook: Hen Harrier Day
- Instagram: @hhdayeruk

ID raptors like a pro with Jack Ashton-Booth

What's the average clutch size for a hen harrier? Can you tell a female from a first-year male? How can knowing your 'hands' help you tell your harriers apart? Join RSPB Investigations fieldworker and raptor expert Jack Ashton-Booth for a series of masterclasses in hen harrier and raptor identification. Packed with facts and loads of detail, these insider guides take you up, close and personal with a species we're usually only lucky to get a distant glimpse of.

Episodes drop on our Hen Harrier Day YouTube channel [insert link] each Friday starting 22 April.

News roundup

Hen harrier 'disappearances'

Sadly, it seems we spoke too soon when reporting no satellite- tagged hen harrier 'disappearances' between our January and February newsletters. Since then, a Natural England update has reported six such 'disappearances' between November 2021 and January 2022 – none previously made public, no appeals for information. Five of the six had been named. So we bid a sad but unsurprised farewell to Val, Percy, Jasmine, Ethel, Amelia and the unnamed bird.

In addition to this, Raptor Persecution UK has recently reported another loss. Oscar was tagged in 2019 in Tweedsmuir, and disappeared in suspicious circumstances in December 2019. This brings the total of hen harriers confirmed missing or illegally killed since 2018 to 68.

White-tailed eagle poisoned

The end of March also brought the disturbing news that the white-tailed eagle found dead earlier this year in Dorset had been poisoned. But not only that, the police investigation into how this bird came to consume seven times the lethal dose of the rodenticide Brodifacoum has been called off by Dorset Police, and a planned ground search has been cancelled. Clearly this is a huge concern on many levels and we await further details of the story with interest.

Lead shot update

Two interesting reports came to light recently. First, it appears that the shooting industry's voluntary approach to phasing out the use of lead shot is having next to no impact. Two years after the voluntary phase-out was announced, a study of shop-sold birds found that 179 out of the 180 carcasses tested had been shot using lead shot. Read more [here](#).

The [second](#) reports that the use of lead shot is having a negative impact on raptor populations in Europe, not really surprising given that many will scavenge on found carcasses and that poisons accumulate as they are transmitted up the food chain.

Burning – please help Wild Moors

Wild Moors has now logged over 1,000 incidents of peatland burning on grouse moors across Northern England: a significant increase on last season's 770. Here's how you can help. Luke Steele is asking us to:

1. Share @wildmoorsuk's social media appeals for sightings of burning (which are going out most days): twitter.com/wildmoorsuk

2. If you get burning reported to your own social media or notice any sightings, tag them: @wildmoorsuk
3. They are picking up some burning in Wales, but none on grouse moors, so please keep an eye out.

Get involved

Have you a hen harrier moment you'd like to share? Email us on info@henharrierday.uk.

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).