



## Hen Harrier Action: June 2022 newsletter



Dear subscriber,

Welcome to our June newsletter, put together as the poppies are coming into flower but the French beans are still looking a little shellshocked to find themselves outside. We're reflecting on Skydancer Day, with a producer's and a presenter's eye view and looking forward to our nest cameras. Our hen harrier moment comes from Jonathan Wilson, a HHA volunteer who produces lovely short videos for our social media.

Next month, we expect to bring you news of all the Hen Harrier Days happening around the UK and of our participation in Wild Justice's Hen Harrier Fest on 24 July.

### Hen Harrier Action news

**Skydancer Day, 14 May 2022**



Five hundred and eighty-nine people watched Skydancer Day live, and so far over 2,800 have watched all or part of the recorded version on [YouTube](#). If you watched the event, whether live or afterwards, do you have any feedback for us? If you haven't watched it, is there a reason why not? We'd love to know so that we can reach even more people next time.

Among many entertaining and informative items, Gill Lewis launched this year's search for Britain's best Young Wild Writers. Do you know anyone between the ages of five and 16 who loves writing and nature? Please tell them about it and encourage them to enter. The closing date is 24 July and you can enter [here](#).

Hen Harrier Action Presents...

2022  
YOUNG  
WILD  
WRITER  
COMPETITION

Get writing!

To celebrate Hen Harrier Day, we want you to tell us about amazing animal journeys. Write a story, poem, article, prose or letter on any theme related to animal journeys.

Prizes:

Submit your piece by 10th July 2022 for a chance to win book tokens, other goodies and an online writing workshop for your school from author Gill Lewis

Winners announced 24th July 2022 at Hen Harrier Fest

Age Categories:

Young 5-8 years  
Junior 9-12 years  
Senior 13-16 years



For more information about rules and how to enter, visit:

<https://www.henharrierday.uk/young-writer>



Here's what Skydancer Day felt like from the studio – first, producer (and Hen Harrier Action trustee) **Paul Samuels**:

“Everyone who’s had anything to do with live streaming will know always to ‘expect the unexpected’. That’s not to say preparation is a waste of time, far from it, but flexibility needs to be built into the setup if you want to survive! Preparing for Skydancer Day started months before the event, both in arranging/ collecting content and in creating the storyline. It changed many times, but each reincarnation became more defined and stable.

Eventually, the cry went up: 'location, location, location!' I surprised myself at how much kit I was going to need: desktop computer, three monitors, cables, gizmos (that's a technical term, by the way, covering lots of small techy bits and pieces). Oh yes, and a camera or two. All to be fitted into a Fiat 500 (I kid you not!) on the journey to the New Forest. At this point, I must thank Chris Packham for letting us use his house to stream from and Cate Crocker for acting as a liaison on site. Having arrived, I began to turn the boot room into a mini studio and electrical death-trap. I could have knitted several pullovers with the cables, but fortunately was able to set up the day before so when I arrived on the morning of the broadcast, everything was ready.

Megan, Indy and the dogs were a delight to work with and the weather was just grand, which made life so much easier as they were located outside. Me, not so much. I was alone. All alone. In the chasm of doom. At some point soon, I needed to press the start button and believe I hadn't forgotten anything vital. Mercifully I hadn't, and all the vagaries of Zoom, audio and encoding data melted into the background. We were live and, as they say, all the rest is history.

In a strange way, I'm looking forward to another dose of blood, sweat and tears because, in spite of everything, there's no business like show business. (MIND THAT CABLE for heaven's sake!!!!)."

And, second, presenter (and Hen Harrier Action trustee) **Indy Greene:**



"Last May I remember sitting down with a cup of hot chocolate; it was particularly cold in Sherwood Forest, so the drink was welcomed. I was watching the first ever Skydancer Day being brilliantly presented by Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin. The event was epic, engaging to a wider audience; it highlighted perfectly the issues that birds of prey face. However, never did I imagine for a moment that I would be presenting year's event, but suddenly I was!

I wasn't nervous in the days leading up to the event. I had been watching the videos every night like a bedtime story, and I had the Stronghill soundtrack [insert link] stuck in my head for all the right reasons – what a song, with such amazing power, meaning and, of course, some superb hen harrier footage in the background. There was, however, one point where I was nervous, and that was when I arrived at Chris's house, and I saw where Megan and I would be presenting in the morning: the famous bench, from which I had seen them both presenting SO many times. It had been the throne of SIBC [Self-Isolating Bird Club] and Hen Harrier Day. Tomorrow I would be sitting on the very same bench alongside Megan for Skydancer Day. Okaaaaaay, no pressure. That evening and throughout the following morning, Megan and I divvied up who would be saying what from the script. Megan being the amazing person and professional she is, was great in setting out exactly what I needed to do and when, which was invaluable.

At 10:30am it was time. Megan and I sat down and waited for our countdown from our producer, Paul Samuels: 30, 29, 28 – I'm sure you know what comes next, and, eventually, it came – 3, 2, 1, and our faces appeared on our monitor: we were live! The first link between the opening and the first film was amazing and I felt so comfortable. After this, the films, links and interviews were whizzing by, and I surprised myself with how comfortable I was with presenting; I really enjoyed it. When we finished, it felt like one of those rare happy/sad moments that made me want to do it all over again! However, we were both pretty hot from a beaming sun by then, and, as those of you who were watching will have noticed, the poodles were getting slightly impatient and were ready for a walk.

My highlight was a moment during the interview between Max Wiszniewski and Minister Màiri McAllan. Megan and I were going in and out to get drinks to keep us cool. When Megan was indoors, a sparrowhawk landed in the tree next to me and a kingfisher flew behind me along the river. I loved seeing them; however, Megan sadly missed the action. It was a topic of conversation which filled the next minute or two of time and perfectly linked to the next film.

Presenting Skydancer Day was a wonderful learning experience and something I will always remember. What made it even more special was the fantastic group of people I had around for support. I'm aware this isn't an Oscars acceptance speech, so don't worry I'll keep it short. Huge thanks to the entire Hen Harrier Action team for coming up with all of the content for the day as well as writing the script and running order. To Paul Samuels for doing an ace job as our producer and editing so much of the content we showed. Lastly, huge thanks to Cate Crocker and Megan McCubbin for supporting me on the day and for the veggie burger with chips the night before.

Thank you so much for watching, those of you that did. If you missed it, you can catch up on the Hen Harrier Day YouTube channel. Please consider supporting us and other organisations doing their best to fight raptor persecution and rewild our uplands.

P.S. Of course, thanks to Chris for letting me stay in his house."

## **Nest cameras**

We never expected getting cameras on two hen harrier nests to be easy. As we learnt last year, they are not easy to film. Obtaining schedule 1 photography licences (from the relevant statutory licensing authority) and finding an active nest near a discreet vantage point with a 4G signal from which to film without disturbing the birds is so difficult; and then, of course, keeping your fingers crossed for perfect environmental conditions (weather, predators, etc.) so that the birds nest successfully. Very challenging hurdles indeed with such a rare and sensitive species.

At the time of writing, we have sadly been unable to locate a hen harrier nest in Wales. This is despite the best efforts of our team, who have been liaising with experienced and fully-licensed field workers, spending hours of their time searching for suitable nests. However, it is with great relief that we can report

that Tarras Valley have agreed to take this second camera to bring us two nestcams! They are raring to go with their (now two) cameras – as those who watched Skydancer Day will have seen. Barring technical hitches, we expect the first camera to go live on the weekend of 18th /19th June, with the other soon after. You can watch the footage, streamed live on our [YouTube channel](#) and [website](#).

We will still use all the satellite tags bought as a result of the amazingly generous response to our fundraiser just before Christmas last year. Hopefully two will be fitted to the strongest chicks from our nestcam nests and another at a nest in England (if for some reason this isn't possible, we'll use them next year). We look forward to seeing successful nesting attempts at both our nests this year and will keep you posted on news of 'our' chicks once they leave the nest and start fending for themselves. Happy viewing!

## News roundup

### **Peat burning in England**

A joint investigation by Greenpeace, Wild Moors and the RSPB of upland burning in England showed that burning on deep peat was still going ahead, despite the recent ban. Part of the problem is that the legislation is complex and full of loopholes, making it difficult to monitor. There's also the question of why it only bans burning of deep peat, defined as peat over 40cm deep. Why this arbitrary border? Is peat 39cm deep dramatically less valuable? The climate certainly doesn't discriminate between the two. And the Climate Change Committee doesn't either, calling for a ban on **all** peat burning.

Some smart detective work was involved, combining satellite data with observations contributed by members of the public. Well done to all involved. For a fuller explanation of the study and what it found, go to [Unearthed](#).

While most of the burning detected appears to have been legal, some was not. Unearthed have passed the data to Natural England and we hope further investigation will take place.

### **Disappearance of two male hen harriers in the Peak District**

As we went to press last time, news emerged of the suspicious disappearance of two male hen harriers in the Peak District National Park. Each had been supporting a nesting female, each sitting on five eggs. Both nests were abandoned, so a potential 12 hen harriers have been lost. The nests were on land owned by the National Trust, adjacent to neighbouring estates managed for driven grouse shooting. Hopefully, this is being investigated by local police. Further evidence, if it were needed, that self-regulation simply doesn't work.

### **Scottish parliament debates 'Ethical Principles in Wildlife Management'**

Scottish Labour MSP Colin Smyth secured a debate on 31 May on 'Ethical Principles in Wildlife Management', based on the seven principles for ethical wildlife 'control' developed by OneKind. During the debate, Minister Màiri McAllan indicated that these ethical principles could be considered as part of future wildlife legislation, which may pave the way for the banning of snares in Scotland. Fingers crossed!

## My hen harrier moment

This month's moment comes from Jonathan Wilson, who introduces himself thus:

"Hi, I am Jonathan and environmental conservation is my passion. Birds and I have an enduring relationship and I have had roles with the Wildlife Trusts and BirdLife International. I am currently supporting bold environmental action, working for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)."

Here is his moment:

"The first encounter never leaves you. Bookmarked in your memory, like a page to be revisited and relived in intimate detail.

The day was overcast. Drizzle hung in the air and it was barely above 10 degrees. I decided I would take a short walk up the deserted stone road to clear my head after two long days of travelling. I was volunteering for the RSPB on the island of Hoy, Orkney. Eighteen years old and fresh out of school, I made the journey to further my growing interest in wildlife conservation – and have an adventure.

Finding a piece of banked grass verge, I sat down on the damp ground to take in the scene. Despite the occasional song of a meadow pipit or call of a twite, winter was reluctant to let go of the landscape that surrounded me. Looking into the distance, remote farmsteads were dotted amongst the yellow-green fields and stone walls. Everything felt dormant. Still. Static. And then it all changed.

Slowly entering from the right of my field of view, drifted a large bird. Barely 20 feet away, dressed in ghostly grey with ink-dipped black wingtips, a male hen harrier glided on a stiff frame interrupted by occasional flaps of his wings. Watched by an audience of one, the male bird flew closer, turned his head, and our eyes met. Like one of Einstein's theories, time stretched out. The bird's penetrating yellow eyes looked deep into mine. I was captivated by the scene, yet even more so by the feeling. Any time a connection is made with an animal, it is precious, yet this seemed greater. All too soon, the bird turned his head away, faced forward and floated off into the distance, finding camouflage in the grey mist that was now descending. I barely noticed the walk back to my accommodation, as my mind lingered on the memory, as it does now, some 13 years later.

For me, this first encounter was unlike any other. I feel privileged to have witnessed it. Perhaps it was whilst observing this magnificent creature that I became aware of the species' continued persecution and rarity as a result. It is my hope that the brave work Hen Harrier Action and other charities continue to do, will help give this bird a future, so many others may gain a first encounter as precious as my own."

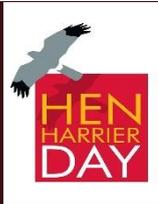
## Get involved

Are you thinking of holding an event for Hen Harrier Day, whether large or small? Please get in touch by emailing [info@henharrierday.uk](mailto: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).

You can buy the Stronghill song premiered on Skydancer Day [here](#) – Stronghill have very generously donated all the proceeds to us and we are very grateful



Website: [henharrierday.uk](http://henharrierday.uk)  
Registered charity: SC049943  
Registered company: SC653279  
The Hen Harrier Day logos shown on this newsletter are Registered Trademarks and must not be used without permission.

To unsubscribe, please click on the link below

[Unsubscribe](#)