



Hen Harrier Action: July 2022 newsletter



Dear supporter,

Welcome to our July newsletter, coming out amid irrefutable evidence that climate change is with us already - record temperatures across the British Isles and massive wildfires all across Southern Europe (not to mention record rainfall and floods in parts of Australia). Time for everyone to decide that burning vegetation on peat is a really bad idea? We can but hope. As ever, we have good news and less good news this month.

Hen Harrier Action news

Nest cameras and satellite tags



Our hugely successful crowdfunding appeal last November raised enough funds to purchase two nest cameras and three satellite tags to monitor hen harriers (again, thank you if you donated). So we were excited and hopeful that this year's effort to live stream from a hen harrier nest would be more fruitful than last year's. In our previous newsletter, we brought you the news that our camera on a Welsh nest was not to be, despite hen harriers doing well in Wales (see Keith Offord's excellent account below).

Our focus was then to concentrate on the camera destined for a nest at Tarras Valley Nature Reserve (TVNR) at Langholm in the Scottish Borders.

Everything was organised, agreements were in place, and an active nest chosen and being monitored. However, the night before we were due to switch on the camera to bring you live footage, the nest was unfortunately predated – by what we don't know, the chicks had simply vanished. As an unkept moor, TVNR does have predators, and that's a good thing, as predation is an entirely natural interaction; however, it is still very disappointing and sad. The team at TVNR were, quite understandably, unwilling to move the camera to another hen harrier nest and so, with no other options available and a live camera going begging, we decided to place the camera on a barn owl nest box on the reserve, which we have to say has been delivering some wonderful footage of the barn owlets and their parents. The live stream is [here](#) until 27 July: We are devastated that this year's efforts have come to nothing but will endeavour to try again next year. It goes to show how difficult it is to film hen harrier nests.

And so to better news: our three satellite tags are currently in the process of being fitted to young hen harriers. One has been fitted to a male from another of the successful nests at TVNR and we have named the bird Charlie. We are still awaiting news of the other two, one in the north of Scotland and one in England, but all should be announced in an upcoming RSPB press release. The tags have been fitted by fully licensed experts and will be monitored by the RSPB as part of their hen harrier monitoring programme. We are excited to see what these young birds get up to in the first few months of life and wish them well. Godspeed Charlie and co!

Hen Harrier Action at Hen Harrier Fest

We will be at Wild Justice's Hen Harrier Fest on 24 July and look forward to meeting and engaging with as many people as possible. Cathleen Thomas will be speaking for Hen Harrier Action; Indy Greene will also be speaking (but not on behalf of Hen Harrier Action). Gill Lewis will be running arts and crafts and Andrea Hudspeth will be there too. Ian Cooper will be on the stall next door, talking about ospreys. You can register to attend [here](#).

Walk for Harriers – 11am on 6th August, Cairngorms National Park (exact location TBA)

In addition to Hen Harrier Fest, which will no doubt be fantastic, we have one other Hen Harrier Day event to announce for our supporters in Scotland: 'Walk for Harriers' is a free, organised walk around a typical intensively-managed driven grouse moor in the Cairngorms National Park. At various points along the walk, we will stop and listen to our key speakers, who will inform us about the wildlife we are likely to see and the various management practices employed in order to maximise the number of red grouse available to shoot during the shooting season. The walk itself won't be strenuous, and should last around 1-2 hrs, though you will need to wear appropriate clothes for the weather and sturdy footwear, and bring a drink and some lunch. Please note that unfortunately the track may be too stony for wheelchairs.

So, if you're based in or visiting the Highlands of Scotland on Saturday 6 August please do come along. Keep an eye on our website, Facebook page and Twitter account for further details, including how to sign up and where we will rendezvous on the day.

See you there!

Young Wild Writers

Once again, the judges were impressed by the standard of the Young Wild Writer entries. This year's theme was animal journeys and entrants have written about a wide range of animals from ants to eagles, and they have taken the interpretation of animal journeys as ones through place and also time. The results will be announced at Hen Harrier Fest, where the overall best entry will be read out. We'll be putting the best pieces from each age group on our website too.

Financial advice needed

HHA's income this year was £21,916 (last year £11,752), most of it 'restricted' funds arising from our satellite tag appeal. We have minimised costs by accounting for the bank transactions (<200 per year) on a simple spreadsheet. However, company law, HMRC and the charity regulator require (i) submission of the accounts in a suitable electronic format; and (ii) an audit.

Do any of our readers have experience of this? If so, we'd welcome advice on the easiest, cheapest (yet professional) way of complying. Please email our Treasurer at: dirk@henharrierday.uk to arrange a chat.

Farewell to Jenny Shelton

Jenny has decided to step down as a Hen Harrier Action trustee. We are sad to see her go, as she had a lot of impact on our progress, including video contributions to our online events. We thank her for all her hard work and wish her the very best for the future.

Hen harriers in Wales – update 2022 by Keith Offord

Since their return to Wales in 1958, there has been a small but stable breeding population of hen harriers in the country, primarily located within three upland Specially Protected Areas (SPAs), Migneint, Berwyn and Hiraethog, with other pairs outside of these SPAs. My own experience with hen harriers in Wales goes back to 1974, when I started monitoring them on the Berwyn SPA. Drawing any conclusions about population trends based on sporadic surveys of individual years can produce misleading results, whereas consistent high-level annual monitoring is likely to produce a more accurate picture. This has been the case for Berwyn for many years. Furthermore, unless there is something atypical about this population, it would seem reasonable to regard these data as representative of similar habitats.

In the process of monitoring, I spend the absolute minimum time at the nest, confining nest visits to a maximum of three (one at egg stage and two on young, two weeks apart), each with a duration of no more than five minutes at the nest. I also ensure nest visits do not interrupt food deliveries by adults. The rest of the time, monitoring is entirely through very distant watches. Fortunately, the privately-owned estates in the areas I monitor do not indulge in illegal persecution, the lack of intensive grouse shooting being an important factor differentiating these from estates in Northern England and Scotland. Additionally, and reassuringly, all landowners who I deal with are completely cooperative and the success of hen harriers on their land reflects this. In addition to monitoring the birds themselves, I ensure very good relations with landowners, adopting an inclusive approach. The same applies to gamekeepers and farmers.

2022 was marked by a very cold, dry April – not atypical of recent weather patterns. Initially, it seemed a slow start, but pairs arrived and settled, producing occupancy in most areas I cover. In the northern two-thirds of Berwyn, following weeks of vantage-point watches, I located 11 breeding pairs which laid 44 eggs, and in northern Migneint I located four breeding pairs which laid 21 eggs. All are now in various stages ranging from newly hatched to fledged young, plus three failures due to natural causes. This is comparable to 2021, which was itself one of the best years in three decades.

As with 2021, birds are also fledging good-sized broods, which indicates plentiful prey supply. In addition to the birds which have nested, there have been other birds, including both immatures and some adults, which did not settle. This is not unusual.

The main threats within the area I cover are primarily natural and include carrion crows, ravens, foxes, common buzzards, goshawks and red kites. Camera traps have been deployed this year to attempt to more fully understand predator activity. A carrion crow has actually been observed this season attempting egg predation while the female harrier was off the nest. I successfully thwarted this by shouting as loudly as possible from 400m away! Pleasingly, the female went on to complete laying and is now feeding four young.

Weather can also be another major factor, and this has had significant effects in certain years such as 2016. So far in 2022 there have not been any spells of unremitting rain, which can be devastating to chicks which are no longer being brooded.

Elsewhere in Wales, the picture this season seems more complex with some traditional sites not occupied and some pairs failing to settle. However, other sites have seen an expansion. The RSPB reserve at Vyrnwy (which is roughly the southern third of Berwyn) has four breeding pairs this season which have laid 14 eggs. Hiraethog has at least two pairs and there may be more elsewhere where coverage by fieldworkers may not be comprehensive.

Analysis of data over a longer period will indicate whether there are significant trends affecting the population of hen harriers in Wales and whether these might have associations with the varying habitats. In the meantime, based on the important strongholds of Berwyn and northern Migneint, it would seem that hen harriers are thriving well in Wales.

News roundup

Langholm buyout update

The Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout received a major boost in early June, with the award of £1 million from the Scottish Land Fund. The aim is to raise £2.2m by 31 July to purchase a further 5,300 acres of Langholm Moor from Buccleuch, nearly doubling the area of the community-owned Tarras Valley Nature Reserve. The [Crowdfunder](#) has now exceeded its £200,000 target but TVNR advise us that it's not too late to donate as there's still some money to find to reach the £2.2m.

Sending red kites to Spain

The red kite is the UK's most successful bird reintroduction project. From being almost extinct at the beginning of the 20th century, red kites can now be found all year round across most of the UK, especially in central England and Wales. The first phase was the introduction of birds from Spain to the Chilterns in 1989; that population expanded so successfully that some of its members were used for further reintroductions in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and North East England. Estimates of the UK's breeding population now vary from 4,600 to nearly 6,000 pairs – the latter figure representing 15% of the world population. The carrion-feeding red kite has declined in Spain because of the poisoning of animal carcasses, sometimes to protect lambs from foxes. But Spanish partner organisation Acción por el Mundo Salvaje expect the Spanish kites to thrive due to the introduction of tough measures – including prison sentences – for illegal poisoning. This has supposedly reduced red kite mortality. If this is so, and only time will tell, then this is a very pleasing story of a favour being returned to the benefit of the natural world.

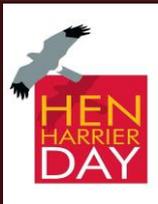
Golden eagles in NE Scotland

A study by the Scottish Raptor Study Group published by the Scottish Ornithologists Club, normally only available to SOC members, can be viewed from the [Raptor Persecution UK blog](#).

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



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