



## Hen Harrier Action: June newsletter



Dear Subscriber,

Welcome to our June newsletter. The big news is that our next online hen harrier day event will be on Sunday 1 August at 10.00am. Modelled on last month's highly successful Skydancer Day, it will have a mix of great new video, interviews, presentation of the winning entries to our Young Wild Writer Competition and Young Filmmaker Challenge (more on these below) and much more. There will be regular updates over the coming weeks on what to look forward to, so do make sure you are following us on social media. Meanwhile, take a look at our competitions and call to action...

### Young Wild Writer Competition



Our hugely popular writing competition returns, and we're hoping that even more children and young people will enter this year. This year's theme is rewilding, with entrants invited to say in up to 500 words what rewilding means for them. Entries can be in any form: for example a story, poem, or diary entry. There are three age groups, up to age 16, with a prize for the winner in each category,

and an overall winner. All the winning entries will be read out by a leading children's author during our event in August. More details of the competition, including how to enter, [here](#). Parents, teachers, all newsletter readers, please help us spread the word.

## Young Filmmaker Challenge



Our other main competition is for young people aged under 30. The challenge is to make a short video about nature in the UK with an upland rewilding theme. The best gets a £250 prize, there are prizes for second and third place too, and we'll show all the best online in August. Entrants (up to three working together) are invited to make a video lasting up to four minutes with content as varied as

you like: animation, graphic art, narrative or interview. The emphasis is on telling a story in an interesting and informative way rather than on technical skills. The challenge is to those studying or starting their careers but will suit older schoolchildren too (there is no lower age limit). More details of the challenge [here](#). Please help us to get the word out. We want to make sure we reach all the talented young filmmakers out there.

## Draw their attention – a call to action



We are in a climate and nature emergency. Yet too often our politicians seem to think business as usual will get us through. Sometimes vivid images can strike home when careful arguments do not. So in this year's call to action we invite you to draw a hen harrier and send it to your local MP with a firm but polite request to act with more urgency. Before sending it, take a photo, send it to us and we'll use

it with all the others, to support the campaign. The more entries, the better. The aim is not just to raise our representatives' awareness but to get a bit of media attention too. Click [here](#) for more detail.

## Skydancer Day

Before moving on, a few words in celebration of Skydancer Day, our first spring event, brilliantly hosted by Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin. Drawing much praise, it has now reached 4,000 views on YouTube, with the number still rising. Named for the hen harrier's famous nuptial display, Skydancer Day celebrated spring in the uplands, with great pieces on the return of moorland birds, plans to turn grouse moor to nature reserve, and some lovely video material. The programme also included some hard-hitting material on the ills of raptor persecution, and an excellent contribution from

Olivia Blake MP, new Westminster species champion for the hen harrier. The full event is still on YouTube and you can now also select individual items to watch (or watch again). To see all on offer, start with the web page [here](#).

## Hen Harrier nestcam update



During Skydancer Day we announced an exciting but challenging new project: live video from a hen harrier nest. We had hoped to have the camera in place for that day but a cold spring meant late nesting and so we had to wait. The camera is now in place but the equipment has been damaged by red deer so we do not have any video clips for you yet.

Happily, the birds themselves are doing fine, with four chicks thriving. That means we can plan to ring the chicks and satellite tag one of them at the end of this month. More news on that soon, including plans for naming the satellite-tagged bird.

## RAPID dogs

Here's news of an exciting initiative to help stop wildlife crime. We know that one of the main problems is detection – so why not recruit some of the world's best detectives? Charlotte Griffiths writes:



“Raptor Persecution Detection Dogs (RAPID) was founded last year to provide forensic detection dogs and handlers to investigate raptor persecution incidents across the UK. The aim of the initiative is to develop both a detection dog service to organisations such as the RSPB and National Wildlife Crime Unit and dog training for those who will themselves use dogs in this way. Initially, the training will focus on finding poisoned birds in the field and buildings. It will then be extended to

include location of crime scenes by finding forensic evidence such as shot residues or other minute traces where tagged birds have ‘disappeared’. Eventually, I hope RAPID will be equipped to tackle every aspect of raptor persecution; significantly enhancing detection, evidence gathering and ultimately deterrence.

The project is being supported by Glyndwr University, which has leading experts in this field, working with the highly decorated David Jones, of UK-K9 Training for Excellence.

You may not know that dogs are already used in a number of conservation contexts, including in finding dead animals around wind turbines, the nests of invasive hornet species, and great crested newts! With raptor persecution seemingly unrelenting in the UK, we desperately need innovative strategies. I believe that RAPID can contribute to this, complementing existing tools so as to increase the prospect of detection and improve evidence-gathering in support of prosecutions. We really have nothing to lose and everything to gain, and there is now surely an urgency to act in trying new initiatives.”

## News round-up

Here's our regular round-up of the nature and environment stories most relevant to the uplands.

Wild Card, a new campaigning rewilding group, has written to the Queen, Prince of Wales and Duke of Cambridge asking them to rewild their land. Signatories include many leading figures in public life, the arts, science and conservation. Like all the best letters, it's signed by a former Archbishop of Canterbury, which may or may not bode well for when the Church of England get a similar letter in the near future. Our interest? Well, the Royal Family own several grouse moors, and we'd really like to see Prince Charles respond to the call regarding his private grouse moor at Delnadamph. The letter got extensive media coverage, for example [here](#).

There's good news from Orkney, where golden eagles are breeding for the first time in nearly 40 years. RSPB staff on the reserve on Hoy spotted the nest earlier this season – and the pair now have chicks. You can read that story [here](#). Golden eagles have slowly recovered in Scotland in recent decades but numbers are still far below where they should be in the eastern Highlands as a result of illegal persecution, with a particularly heinous instance recently reported [here](#).

It's great to see eagles re-colonising (and to read [recent reports](#) of white-tailed eagles at Loch Lomond) but it is a slow process that can be helped by humans. The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project runs a translocation project to boost the southern golden eagle population, and you might be interested to join their celebratory [Moffat Eagle Week](#) in September.

Sadly the [news](#) on hen harriers is all too predictably bad – the suspicious disappearance of two male hen harriers, both servicing nests on the RSPB Geltsdale reserve in Cumbria. The RSPB can look after the birds on the reserve but Geltsdale is close to land managed for driven grouse shooting. The RPUK total of such losses now stands at 56 in the last three years. Remember that number is just tagged birds; the true losses will inevitably be much higher. This is nothing less than a determined criminal conspiracy to make these birds extinct.

On the political front, it's always a bit hard to tell what's puff and what's real. After the election in Scotland, the appointments of Mairi Gougeon (hen harrier species champion) and Màiri McAllan have been widely welcomed by conservationists, while there were few tears shed for the departure of Fergus Ewing. But what we need to see now is a step change in the sense of urgency shown by the government, and there are no immediate signs of that, with no date set for the introduction of licensing of driven grouse shooting.

Meanwhile in England, George Eustace made a big speech which was initially cautiously welcomed by conservationists, as for example [here](#). A highlight was the apparent promise of a binding 2030 target for species abundance, though alarm bells rang over some rather threatening muttering over 'refocusing' the Habitats Regulations. Possibly predictably, the government has now put legislative wording around the new target, rendering it all but worthless, and at the same time reinforcing concerns about weakening of the Habitats Regulations. Wildlife and Countryside Link, whose petition you may have signed, were quick to protest [here](#). All the more reason to sign that [petition](#) if you have not already.

And an event to come: the [petition](#) to the UK government and parliament initiated by Wild Justice will finally be debated on 21 June. Don't expect much from the debate but there are new and good MPs with an interest in this area and some of the old guard have gone. So it will be better than the last one in 2016, and the government will have pay a bit more attention than Thérèse Coffey, then junior environment minister, managed last time.

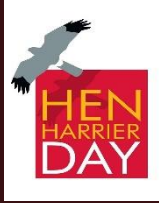
## Help needed

Heading into our summer programme, we're especially looking for help with our marketing and communications. We remain a tiny charity, even if we sometimes seem to punch above our weight, and we need all the help we can get in our main objective of reaching new audiences and engaging them in the plight of the hen harrier and the other wildlife of the uplands. We're looking for support at all levels, from help with planning to just being available to tweet and retweet our messages. Please get in touch [here](#).

## Support us

Since the last newsletter we've had many very generous donations including some larger (for us) ones – thank you so much to everyone who has contributed' whatever the amount. We are especially grateful for a number of new direct debits, which greatly help the sound financial management of the charity. Donations are eligible for Gift Aid; to make a donation, click [here](#).





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