

October 2021



## Hen Harrier Action: October newsletter



Dear Subscriber,

Welcome to our October newsletter. It's unusually prompt this month because we want to bring you news of our secret postcard art auction before it closes on Sunday.

## Secret Postcard Art Auction: closes Sunday 3 October



Every year, we run a wildlife art auction in conjunction with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. It's an important fundraiser for us. The way it works is that artists donate A5-size work and you bid for the pieces you like best, not knowing who made them. There are works by international and other established artists, excellent amateurs, young people and children. Have a look

and make a bid. You'll certainly get something you like, regardless of the artist, you might end up with a work by a famous artist and on top of that you will have contributed to a good cause. You can read more about the auction [here](#), and the direct link to the auction site is [here](#).

## Scorched earth?



You'll hear a lot more about heather burning, muirburn, in the coming weeks. The 'burning season' on the moors starts on 1 October. With COP26 in Glasgow starting a month later, smoke rising from vast areas of moorland is set to embarrass the UK.

Let's be clear. Burning moorland is not 'managing' it, it is destroying it. Forget the lies about 'prescribed

burning'; there is no such thing in the UK. Burning on peatland destroys the peat over time, causing enormous damage to the environment. To help avoid climate catastrophe, our peatlands don't need burning, they need re-wetting, and as quickly as possible. A [recent study](#) suggests that the sooner restoration is completed the better, saving over £75 per household per year in Scotland. Of course, it's not just climate change; burning reduces biodiversity and increases the frequency of flooding and the cost of drinking water

treatment. Smoke from heather burning is also increasingly recognised as a health hazard.

But back to COP26: in late 2020, the UK Committee on Climate Change [recommended](#) a trajectory to full restoration of our peatlands by 2045, including the banning of rotational burning. We are already behind that, and though governments have started to take action or indicated an intention of doing so, present constraints are weak or non-existent. So before the law is toughened, this burning season could be the worst yet. Will upland managers show restraint as the world looks on? Or will they redouble their scorched earth efforts?

You can join community action to help map the damage being caused, by reporting burning on a special [RSPB webpage](#). This has been updated for the 2021 burning season, and from that page you can download a new app for your mobile phone to report burning when you are out and about.

## Indy on Mull



We are delighted that Indy Kiemel Greene has joined the HHA board of trustees. Indy is a well-known young naturalist who does much excellent work in encouraging greater engagement with the natural world. Here he tells of his summer on Mull. Already well-known for wildlife tourism, with studies underlying its economic value, Mull gets quite a write-up from Indy here:

“Hello, my name is Indy, I’m a 16-year-old naturalist and goshawk lover from Nottinghamshire. I’m lucky enough to live a stone’s throw from Sherwood Forest. I am truly honoured to be a new trustee of Hen Harrier Action, a fantastic group dedicated to raising awareness of raptor persecution and other issues affecting the uplands.

Hen harriers are a species that has been hit particularly hard by raptor persecution, but I was fortunate enough to see many this summer. For the month of July I was on the outstanding Isle of Mull, working with two eco-tourism companies, Nature Scotland and Sea Life Surveys. Nature Scotland,

run by my very good friend Ewan Miles, is based on Mull but also ventures out into the Cairngorms and elsewhere. The Mull tours involve a full day exploring the wild parts of the island looking for key species. These include white-tailed and golden eagle, otters, red deer, seals, hen harrier, adder and more. These more common species can be seen on an almost daily basis, but sometimes we got very lucky. A big highlight was seeing ptarmigan (pictured), one of Mull's rarest breeding birds, high in the mountain tops. It was the first confirmed breeding record for Mull. We had phenomenal views of 2 chicks, 1 adult female and 2 adult males. To top the day, we also saw a red-throated diver with a very cute chick and a large colony of golden plover whistling through the valley.

My sea-based adventures with Sea Life Surveys were just as rewarding. I was lucky enough to be asked to be a guide for a week where we were rewarded with daily pods of common dolphins, porpoise and minke whales. Not to mention thousands upon thousands of sea birds: Manx shearwater, great skua, storm petrel, fulmar, Arctic tern, guillemot, puffin, razorbill, shag, kittiwake, great black-backed gull, and gannet. My last day out at sea was by far the best, the water was \*completely\* flat. There was a tiny breeze, it was a pleasant 20°C with blue skies and blue water, perfect spotting conditions. The wildlife delivered better than we could have ever imagined: 200 common dolphins and 8 minke whales in with the pod. The whole horizon just made up of cetaceans, truly magical.”

## A high street stall: an experiment looking forward to next year



Many in our community have said that Hen Harrier Day should also be celebrated by taking our message to the high street, to farmers' markets, to stalls at county fairs and so on. That way we get our message to new people, helping to deliver our core charitable purposes. Quite right, so we had a little trial in Falkirk last weekend, set up by the indefatigable Les Wallace. Here's his report:

"I've only ever been able to get to one Hen Harrier Day event; like many I don't have ready access to transport to the places they have been held. And though it's great to be able to meet like-minded and passionate people, if we are going to bring more people on board we'll have to complement such events by doing something new and different.

That was why my friend Helen and I took to Falkirk High Street on 25 September.

Rampant raptor persecution (illegal), huge slaughter of many other animals (much of it still legal), heather burning reducing carbon sequestration and increasing flooding, plus many other ills. Loss and suppression of alternative businesses and jobs. The public will be on to our side IF we can get that information to them. That's what Helen and I wanted to test. How can we present information to the general public to catch their attention and support?

Hen Harrier Action were hugely supportive. They created a leaflet to give information, supplied a banner for our stall, and provided images. So too did others: from a wildlife photographer to a member of the Scottish Wild Beaver Group. Some of the images we used did not spare the horror of persecution on the moors but Mr Carbo sent some of his infamous cartoons, so our messages

also had humour. We mainly stressed the positives, how rewilding can create new opportunities for nature and for people. We had a special focus on beavers as nature's engineers, including by creating natural firebreaks, and Mr Carbo kindly created a special cartoon (pictured here) to make that point.

This first effort was quite rudimentary; for example, we attached the display boards to the roller blind of an empty shop. That's Falkirk High Street, sadly not as busy as it once was. But we learned lessons from it about keeping messages simple and clear. For example, we realised that whilst the messages behind our (sometimes disturbing) display board images were clear to us, they were not always clear to others.

Even so, feedback was very positive. I was impressed by the number of people that knew something about the issues - how many would have done so even 10 years ago? I had a particularly enjoyable conversation about rewilding with an Italian couple - yes Falkirk is cosmopolitan! I'm convinced that campaigners with good promotional materials and resources such as a proper stall (we didn't have that) could reach new audiences and engage local media. Such stalls could be a great complement to larger events. Imagine the impact of stalls popping up in Durham, Rochdale, Nottingham, Harrogate. It was certainly a breath of fresh air to be talking to a few new faces rather than preaching to the converted yet again. Our efforts had modest resources but they were enough to point to very exciting possibilities!

I can't finish without saying thank you to Helen and all the others who helped out - you know who you are."

If you would like to run a stall on these lines, whether on the high street, a market or another event near you, please [let us know](#). We can help with materials and other support, as Les describes above, matched to what you need and want to do.

## News from Hen Harrier Action

HHA is delighted to announce that Carol Rawlings is to join us as a trustee. Carol's professional background is in communications, she served on the RSPB Council until 2012 and is a long-standing advocate for urban peregrines. You can read more about her and other trustees [here](#).

The week from 19 to 26 September saw the UK's first Eagle Festival. Organised by the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project and supported by

'Visit Moffat', the festival promoted the Borders town of Moffat as a wildlife tourism destination. It was also supported by many local businesses, celebrities, and others and according to [reports](#) it was a great success. Shortly before the festival, the project released 8 further translocated eagles, taking the total to 12. The area still has a severely depleted eagle population, and we wish these birds well. Hopefully, the festival will have further helped convert local hearts and minds to the value of their conservation.

National parks have been much criticised over the years for doing too little to protect nature. Admittedly they have limited powers, though critics say that they are too timid in using the powers they have. But as public opinion swings against the malpractices associated with driven grouse shooting, we are starting to see some toughening of positions. The Cairngorms National Park is [consulting](#) on its next management plan, which will run until 2027. The draft includes objectives on burning, peatland restoration, deer numbers, game bird management and raptor persecution. You can help influence this plan: everyone, including those who might visit the park, can express views.

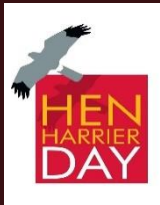
The new Scottish government, in which the Scottish Greens are participating, has published its [programme for 2021-22](#). There is a promise of urgency in the introduction of grouse moor licensing, including control of muirburn. After years of foot-dragging, perhaps we really shall see action now. Good news for eagles and hen harriers?

The Welsh government too is perhaps showing a greater willingness to tackle problems associated with game shooting. Following a challenge by Wild Justice on the legality of general licences to shoot certain species, the Welsh government is arguably taking the underlying issues raised more seriously than others. So there's a [consultation](#) on that too. It is very long but you don't have to answer all the questions, and many are just yes/no anyway. You might say, for example, that there is no justification at all for shooting jays to protect other birds. In terms of public benefit, jays are brilliant, they are unpaid forest creators; and Wales needs a few more native trees.

## Support us

Many thanks to all the supporters who have once again been so generous in supporting our work. Recent donations include several larger amounts from people who have already previously made generous contributions. Special thanks to them and to all others too, whatever the amount. The funding is

most welcome but so too is the encouragement for our efforts. Donations are eligible for Gift Aid: to make a donation, click [here](#).



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