



Working for wild Birds of Prey and their Habitats

Press Release

GAINING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HEN HARRIER BEHAVIOUR TO IMPROVE ITS FUTURE IN ENGLAND

The Hawk and Owl Trust working in partnership with Natural England

Summary

By satellite tagging two juvenile Hen Harriers the Hawk and Owl Trust, together with Natural England, are hoping to extend our knowledge of what happens to them once they leave the nests from which they have been fledged. Any knowledge gained may help us save The Hen Harrier in England which is in real danger of becoming extinct as a breeding bird.

The Facts

The Hen Harrier is an elegant bird of prey that frequents the heather uplands of northern England.

The male is spectacularly beautiful with its silver-grey plumage. The female, is larger and her plumage is an overall chocolate- brown. She has a white patch on her rump and her tail is barred with darker bands.

Over a short period in the summer, the Hen Harrier kills, amongst other prey items, Red grouse chicks, to feed its young and this has brought it into conflict with those who intensively manage the moors for driven grouse shooting. Some of whom take the law into their own hands and illegally persecute this magnificent bird.

The population of breeding Hen Harriers in England has fluctuated wildly over the last twenty years. In 2013 it was extinct as a breeding bird. This year, 2016, there were only three breeding pairs. None of the nests were on grouse moors.

Scientists tell us that the heather moorlands of northern England could support 250 – 300 pairs.

What is being done to resolve this conflict between conservationists and grouse moor owners? In January the government set up a group, led by DEFRA, to study the issues facing the Hen Harrier in England and to implement an Action Plan to resolve the long running conflict and speed the recovery of the Hen Harrier. The Hawk and Owl Trust are involved in assisting in this strategy.

Hawk and Owl Trust

Registered Charity No 1068565

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As part of this Action Plan Stephen Murphy of Natural England on behalf of The Hawk and Owl Trust, has satellite tagged two juvenile Hen Harriers, one male and one female – from a nest on the Scottish borders, literally a stone's throw from England. Sadly, because of the very low numbers breeding in England this year, we were unable to tag English birds. The satellite tagging we believe will give us information that will improve our understanding of harrier dispersal from the nests where they fledged, their dispersal across the heather uplands and their use of communal roost sites in winter where they are most vulnerable to persecution.

The information received from the satellite, after the harriers have left their natal area, will be screened by the Hawk and Owl Trust before being displayed on their dedicated website. Here, you will be able to follow the fortunes of the two juvenile Hen Harriers, which have been named Rowan, the male, and Sorrel, the female.

Photographs of the satellite tagging taken by **Hamish Smith** (hamish.smith@volunteer.hawkandowl.org) who also acts as the Project Coordinator.