



Common Kestrels?

Dr Emily Joáchim takes a look at the recent fortunes of one of our most familiar raptors

Hovering Kestrel

The Kestrel is one of our most familiar raptors and is often spotted hovering over mixed farmland and grassland verges near roads. Its vernacular name, the 'Common Kestrel', rings true, as this species is one of the most widespread and abundant raptors in Britain. *Bird Atlas 2007-11* reported that the Kestrel was present in 90% of the 10-km survey squares. There are approximately 46,000 breeding pairs in Britain.

So why are we concerned for the 'Common' Kestrel? By the mid 1970s, our Kestrel population had recovered from the lethal and sub-lethal effects (e.g. eggshell thinning) of organophosphate pesticides, but shortly after, their population started to decline once again.

cates a decline in Kestrel abundance within many of the 10km survey squares. Their breeding range has contracted by 6% since the 1968-72 *Breeding Atlas*, with losses mainly occurring in southwest and central Wales and western Scotland. The cause of their more recent decline remains unclear.

The Kestrel Highways Project was launched by the Trust in 2009 to provide nest boxes for Kestrels along roads in Britain, as it is possible that

breeding attempts by Kestrels in the project's boxes and we have ringed 212 chicks! The 2014 Kestrel Highways Report will feature in the next issue of *Peregrine*.

Don't forget, you can submit your Kestrel sightings via the Trust's website, so ask your car passengers to keep a look out for Kestrels near roads!



Brood of Kestrel Chicks



Nigel Lewis Ringing Kestrel Chicks



Ringing

This decline has been linked with the effects of agricultural intensification, in particular, the loss of nesting habitat and declines in small mammal populations; their main prey type. Since 1985, the Kestrel's Breeding Bird Survey population trend has fluctuated and the Kestrel has declined by 30% between 1995 and 2011; they have declined by 57% in Scotland and 15% in England.

Whilst this species still breeds at high densities on mixed farmland, particularly in England, the latest *Bird Atlas* indi-

their decline is linked with low nest site availability. Eight voluntary sub-teams maintain and monitor 180 boxes each year, which are sited within 0.5 and 1 km from 13 major roads in Britain.

The teams submit their Kestrel nest records to BTO and any chicks are ringed. So far, there have been 71

Report them here:
hawkandowl.org/our-work/research/report-a-kestrel-highways-project-sighting/