

Hen Harrier Fund Raiser

The Nidderdale Raptor Study Group in collaboration with the Northern England Raptor Forum are proud to bring you this exciting fund raising opportunity to raise money for the RSPB Investigations Team to purchase satellite tags to be fitted to Hen Harriers.

The Hen Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*, is the UK's most persecuted Bird of Prey. Previously driven to extinction as a breeding species in England the population is struggling to make a widespread come-back. The population remains perilously small and persecution on land managed for driven grouse shooting continues to be the primary factor limiting both population growth and expansion.



In a scientific paper published by Murgatroyd et al, using data from Natural England's Hen Harrier Recovery Project, the authors revealed that the likelihood of Hen Harriers dying, or disappearing, was ten times higher within landscapes predominantly covered by grouse moor, compared to areas with no grouse moor. The study also revealed that 72% of tagged harriers were either confirmed or considered very likely to have been illegally killed.

For the past 10 years the RSPB has been monitoring Hen Harriers, firstly within the Skydancer Project and latterly as part of the Hen Harrier Life Plus Project. In both projects satellite tags were fitted to nestlings during the breeding season by highly trained specialists. The solar



powered tags, weighing 9.5 grams, are fitted to the birds by a harness that resembles a backpack. Once activated the tags are exceptionally reliable and provide data that allows the RSPB Investigations Team to accurately track the bird's movements daily.

The satellite tag also provides the ornithologists with data about how much solar generated voltage the tag has available and also information regarding the bird's mobility and temperature. When analysed in conjunction with one another it can tell us whether the bird is dead or alive.

By carefully analysing all the data it is possible to determine the most probable reason why an individual bird appears to have stopped moving. Obviously, the bird may have died of natural causes or been predated. In the event that the tag suddenly and without prior warning fails to communicate with the satellites overhead, within a predicted time frame, a situation frequently referred to as 'stop no malfunction', the most likely reason is that the bird has been killed.

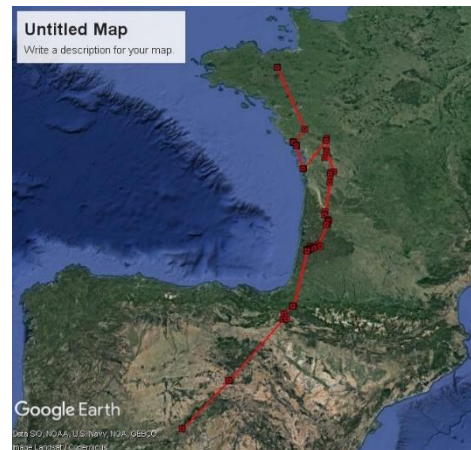
In both scenarios a thorough ground search is conducted by the RSPB Investigations Team in the area of the last known location of the bird using very sophisticated equipment. In cases where the satellite data indicates that the bird probably died of natural causes the dead bird is invariably located. In contrast when the tag inexplicably '*stops no malfunction*' the dead birds are rarely located, a further indication that the bird was illegally killed and the tag destroyed.

Whilst the RSPB data has yet to be published [the scientific papers are being completed at the moment] by reading the high volume of press statements released by the RSPB over the life time of both projects, it is not unreasonable to assume that analysis of the satellite data will provide another damning indictment of the grouse shooting industry.

In addition to highlighting regions of high levels of persecution the satellite data also identifies previously unknown winter roosting areas. There is a saying amongst Hen Harrier workers – *'Harriers bring Harriers'*. By following the satellite tagged Harriers we are able to count the untagged birds that are also using the winter roosts, some of which were previously unknown prior to the development of satellite tags. That in turn allows researchers to better understand how Hen Harriers occupy the landscape across the northern uplands over winter. Using all of this data the statisticians are able to model the autumn / winter population more accurately.

Using the modelled winter population data and comparing it with the known breeding population gives us a better understanding of how the population is prospering overall year on year. This information can be used by the RSPB and other conservation NGOs to lobby Government to change legislation to better protect this extremely vulnerable species from disturbance during the autumn / winter roosting season.

Raptor workers have long suspected / known that the UK hosts Hen Harriers from Scotland and the near continent during the autumn and winter. The use of satellite tags has now confirmed that *'English Hen Harriers'* also travel vast distances to over winter hundreds of miles from their breeding sites. This satellite track indicates the movements of a bird that was originally tagged in the Forest of Bowland in 2019. The bird returned to Bowland earlier this year and is now back in Spain. Sharing this data with our European partners enables them to monitor the bird over-winter on our behalf and to potentially locate unknown local roosts, in much the same way that the RSPB Investigations Teams do in the UK.



The use of satellite tags has already delivered a tremendous amount of new data confirming the continuing high level of persecution on land managed for driven grouse shooting. Additionally the data has highlighted the remarkable mobility of Hen Harriers outside of the breeding season. However, there is still much to learn about these magnificent birds and the continued deployment of satellite tags is vital to achieving this goal.



Dan Evans, a Yorkshire-based artist, has kindly chosen to create an A2-sized oil painting of a male Hen Harrier, which has been donated to the Nidderdale Raptor Study Group for an online auction; all proceeds will go to RSPB Investigations to fund satellite tags for Hen Harriers. The painting was inspired after Dan had spent time with members of the Raptor Study Group monitoring Hen Harriers locally. This is a unique opportunity to acquire the original spectacular painting. To place your bid for

the painting please click this link to the auction.

<https://danevans.art/hen-harrier>

In addition to the auction, a limited number of signed prints will be available. The price of these are £50+p+p (A3) and £80+p+p (A2). Click here for details:

<https://danevans.art/shop/p/l5w1w125yctk1qr7k99vvjl9tqs5i9>

Once again all profits from the prints will go to fund satellite tags through the RSPB Investigations Team.

We appreciate that these are extraordinarily challenging times and not everyone who would like to buy a print will be in a position to do so but still want to support the project. To ensure that you have the opportunity to contribute to this invaluable scheme, on any level, we have created a '*Justgiving*' fundraising webpage. If you would like to help us donate satellite tags to the RSPB Investigations Team please visit:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/hen-harrier-sat-tags>

We would like to thank you in advance for supporting this scheme; a scheme that will be of tremendous benefit to Hen Harriers by increasing their level of protection and also by revealing invaluable data about how they move through, and use, their natural environment throughout the year. We would be grateful if you could circulate the details of the project as far and wide as possible.

In the meantime we would like to wish you and your families a Happy Christmas and a peaceful and fulfilling New Year.

Stay well and stay safe.

NERF

1 December 2020.