

# Northern England Raptor Forum

## Annual Review 2017



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## Photograph credits

<b>Front Cover:</b>	Gordon Yates
Osprey	Gordon Yates
Honey Buzzard	Andrew Money
Golden Eagle	Gordon Yates
Sparrowhawk	Gordon Yates
Goshawk	Andy Butler
Marsh Harrier	Gordon Yates
Hen Harrier	Gordon Yates, Gordon Richardson
Pallid Harrier	Mike Watson
Montagu's Harrier	Mark Yates
Red Kite	Ivan Ellison
White-tailed Eagle	Gordon Yates
Rough-legged Buzzard	Peter Richman
Buzzard	Gordon Yates
Barn Owl	John Dermott
Eagle Owl	Bill Hesketh
Tawny Owl	Mike Killelea
Little Owl	Pat Killelea
Long-eared Owl	Bob Kenworthy
Short-eared Owl	David Raw
Kestrel	Ken Smith
Merlin	Colin Dilcock
Hobby	Andy Butler
Peregrine	Adrian Dancy
Raven	Gordon Yates

## Useful telephone numbers

If you discover a wildlife crime please report the details to the Police, obtain an incident number and ask that, in addition to sending an Officer to the scene, the report is brought to the attention of the Force Wildlife Crime Officer. If the incident is a 'crime in progress' dial 999. The national non-emergency telephone number is 101 and Crimestoppers 0800 555111

Cheshire Constabulary 0845 458 0000

Cleveland Police 01642 326326

Cumbria Constabulary 0845 330 0247

Derbyshire Constabulary 0345 123 3333

Durham Constabulary 0345 606 0365

Humberside Police 0845 125 3545

Lancashire Constabulary 0845 125 3545

Manchester Police 0161 872 5050 (General Enquiries).

Northumbria Police 0345 604 3043

North Yorkshire Police 0845 606 0247

South Yorkshire Police 0114 220 2020

West Yorkshire Police 0845 606 0606

**RSPB:** Investigations Dept. 01767 680551. Investigations Officer (Howard Jones) 07834534142. Assistant Investigations Officer (LIFE Hen Harrier Project) (Jack Ashton-Booth) 07568103445. **Hen Harrier sightings:** RSPB hotline 0845 4600121 or

[henharriers@rspb.org.uk](mailto:henharriers@rspb.org.uk)

Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (Natural England) 0800 321600

CEH Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme 01524 595830

## Foreword

### Paul Irving



In 2006 a group of raptor workers met in Hawes but this was no ordinary meeting, nor were these ordinary raptor workers - they were from all corners of Northern England. Some knew each other but this was the first time they had met as a group and it led to the formation of NERF. I was privileged to have been elected chairman and served until early 2018 when I “retired” to mid Wales.

Much has changed since that inaugural meeting: membership has changed; Cumbria decided sadly that NERF was not for them. We decided that the North West Protection Group was not for us, and the Ryedale group couldn't survive the death of Mick Carroll. Bowland RSG, Manchester and Cheshire have joined us since that inaugural meeting, all of course are made welcome, as are our colleagues from RSPB and NE who attend most of our twice-yearly meetings.

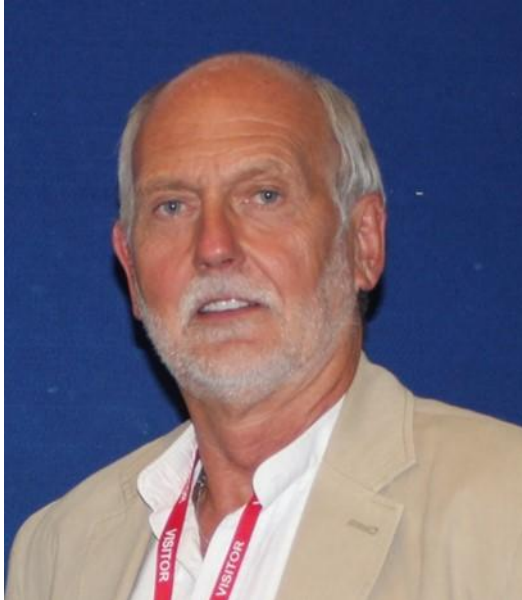
In some ways we have moved on considerably, in others not so. The Natural England Hen Harrier Recovery Project, which at one time held out a great deal of promise has essentially died, replaced by the newer recovery plan containing elements that along with RSPB we feel unable to support. Although the RSPB Hen Harrier Life project is something we can all sign up to and has achieved a number of good things, it is not the government-led project many of us feel the species still needs. Hen Harriers of course are still our number one topic. The Peregrine paper we produced in conjunction with RSPB scientists really did show what was happening to these birds in our uplands and if anything the situation has got worse rather than better. It may be time for a written update. We have also helped to co-ordinate and conduct a number of national surveys notably on Peregrines and Hen Harriers, although we are often short of vital manpower in a number of areas.

We clearly have contributed through the above and our own Annual Reviews to a better understanding of what is happening to predatory birds in our uplands. Our presence on the Raptor Persecution Prevention Delivery Group is to my mind vital, despite the very slow progress and obfuscation of the shooting lobby representatives there. We have probably all benefited from discussions amongst ourselves and with colleagues in RSPB, NE and the police.

There is however still much to do, and challenges to confront or come to terms with, not least the continuing thorny issue of Hen Harriers. I always felt privileged to be the group chairman

and know that it will continue to be important and grow. To those reading this, who are not part of a member group, I would urge you to join one: the birds will benefit, it may make your conservation contribution more valuable, and you will be welcomed by like minds who will doubtless become friends and colleagues.

## Chairman's Report



Welcome to the ninth Annual Review of the raptor monitoring work undertaken by NERF members. This is my first as Chairman of the organisation which I believe is the foremost coalition of Raptor Study Groups in England. The change in the Chairmanship of NERF was precipitated by the departure of our previous Chairman, Paul Irving, to pastures new, or as Raptor Workers would prefer to call it 'a new raptor study area' in Wales. There is always a kaleidoscope of emotions when we say farewell to a friend, whom many of us have known for decades. This is equally true even though we accept that his self-imposed 'exile' opens the door to a new and exciting chapter in his life. His friends in NERF, and in the wider northern Raptor Worker community, wish him well in his new life; but we also look forward

to seeing him back on the hills of the Yorkshire Dales and at the NERF Annual Conferences. Following my appointment as Chairman, in an ideal world my first contribution to the NERF Annual Review would be to announce '*bird of prey threat analysis completed – no threats identified. Job done, let's go monitor birds of prey – for the benefit of avian science and for the joy of watching raptors*'. Unfortunately it is not an ideal world for raptors and the making of such an announcement is wishful thinking, and it is very unlikely to be on the cards in the near future, or for that matter, the foreseeable future. With that in mind I envisage that my primary role as Chairman is to act as the conduit through which NERF can continue to promote our values and policies for the benefit of birds of prey.

Raptors have never had it easy. They are apex predators, sitting on the top of their food chain and are vulnerable to many challenges. Whilst many look large most are surprisingly slightly built, which allows them to benefit from both the speed and agility required to catch their prey. However, being susceptible to the vagaries of the weather and the availability of prey they are vulnerable to comparatively minor deteriorations in either, which can have major impacts on their annual breeding success. That is the natural world in action and over millennia all raptor species have developed a strategy to cope with these fluctuations. Unfortunately they have not had thousands of years to develop a strategy to deal with men, and it is invariably men, who are committed to persecuting them. The relentless use of raptor persecution to support the shooting industry, particularly on estates managed for driven grouse shooting, continues to give us grave cause for concern.

In an effort to reduce, hopefully eliminate raptor persecution, NERF has been an active participant on the Police led Raptor Persecution Prevention Delivery Group [RPPDG], a sub-group of the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime [PAW] for many years. Our work towards this aim was recognised when NERF was presented with the prestigious PAW – 'Partner of the Year Award'. One of the many complex issues that have challenged the

RPPDG for a considerable time, is *'what constitutes a raptor-related wildlife crime and how should the data be made available to the public?'* Whilst this may appear to be a complex legal issue in reality it is not. The answer is clearly set out in the Home Office crime reporting guidelines, which specifies that if someone reports a crime then *it is a crime* until the investigating authorities prove otherwise. A separate guideline states quite clearly that crimes should be reported on the basis of *'one victim, one crime'*. Additionally under the Criminal Attempts Act 1981 an attempt to commit a crime - *is a crime*, unless the investigation proves otherwise. Consequently any attempt to kill a bird of prey should be included in the national raptor persecution statistics. All that is required to publish accurate data is to follow legislation and guidelines that are already in place. Throughout the RPPDG discussions the representatives of the shooting industry argued long and hard to ensure that the criteria for recording the actual crime figures were kept as low as feasibly possible and attempts to commit crimes were excluded completely. Their arguments were self-serving and did nothing to ensure that the published data recorded the true extent of the problem and therefore reduced our collective ability to prevent crimes against birds of prey. By adopting the *'keep the numbers low'* model as the definitive record of the crimes, it is much easier for the game shooting industry to argue that *'no data equals no crimes equals no problem'*. Regrettably, for some inexplicable reason, the leadership of the RPPDG, an organisation charged with preventing raptor persecution, chose to support the entreaties of the shooting representatives and ignore the official guidelines, which seriously undermined our ability to accurately report raptor persecution. As a consequence of that unacceptable outcome NERF refused to support the publication of suppressed data on the Defra Magic Map system. That decision was taken on the basis that the data collection did not comply with the current legislation or the Home Office guidelines and was therefore both deliberately misleading and consequently unsupportable as a public record of the true extent of the problem. Historically NERF members have witnessed the whole spectrum of raptor persecution and 2017 was no different. One such incident was the persecution of a Marsh Harrier nesting in a NERF study area within the Nidderdale AONB, Yorkshire. In May 2017 a Marsh Harrier nest containing 5 eggs was discovered on Denton Moor, which is a managed grouse moor. A camera, installed by the RSPB Investigations Team, recorded a minimum of two individuals carrying what appeared to be shotguns visiting the nest six times on the 17th May. Gun shots and what appeared to be a quad bike, were heard on the video, and one of the individuals was filmed removing something from the nest. On the following day, 18th May, a person carrying a green rucksack, was recorded at the nest at 9.40am. This individual stood over the nest, bent down, and once again it appeared that something was removed from the nest. A subsequent visit by the RSPB Investigators revealed that the nest had been 'robbed'. This nesting attempt was only the second recorded in the whole of the North of England during 2017 and it failed following two visits by individuals dressed in what the North Yorkshire Police described as *'men wearing dull, brownish-green coloured jackets, traditional country caps and carrying what appeared to be shotguns and a brown game bag'*. Following extensive enquiries by the Police, and they really were extensive, the individuals involved were not identified and the crime remains undetected. On behalf of NERF I would like to place on record our thanks to the RSPB Investigations Team and North Yorkshire Police for their professionalism in pursuing this case with vigour. A more detailed account of this incident can be found in the Marsh Harrier section of this Annual Report. The incident at the Marsh Harrier nest on Denton Moors is not the only recent raptor-related crime which is of great concern to NERF members, and the wider conservation community. In another incident the RSPB Investigations Team installed a covert camera to monitor a Peregrine nest in a remote part of the Forest of Bowland. It was known that the nest had

failed for several consecutive years; however the cause of those failures remained unknown. Following the installation of the camera the video recorded the female Peregrine rapidly leaving the nest seconds before four shots were heard in the vicinity of the nest. The female was never seen again. Minutes later a person dressed from head to foot in camouflaged clothing climbed up to the nest ledge and installed two spring traps near to the eggs. Sometime later the male returned to the nest and was caught in one of the traps and there it hung for the rest of the day, flapping furiously in a futile attempt to escape. Many hours later, during the hours of darkness, a person returned to the nest ledge and removed the male Peregrine and the traps. The matter was reported to the Police and a suspect was identified. Following a very thorough investigation by Officers from Lancashire Police the matter was placed before the courts. Up to that point this criminal investigation had followed the normal path to trial. However, this was to change during a preliminary hearing when the Defence Council successfully argued that the video evidence was inadmissible on the grounds that the camera had been installed without the consent of the landowner in contravention of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 [RIPA] and breached the human rights of anyone walking across the moorland. Both of these claims were ridiculous and could have easily been refuted by a competent Prosecutor. Unfortunately they were not challenged and the case collapsed before it went to trial.

What followed next was truly appalling. Representatives of the shooting community on the one hand condemned raptor persecution then on the other hand launched an attack on the actions of the RSPB, fellow RPPDG members, claiming that they, and they alone, were responsible for the collapse of the trial. At the same time they claimed to support the gathering of video evidence in cases of this nature by the Police who are required to adhere to the controls embedded in RIPA. That sounds like a positive, supportive proposition from the shooting industry that should be welcomed by everyone concerned about the persecution of birds of prey; doesn't it? On first hearing it may sound so but in reality it is the very opposite. The same people from the shooting industry who are calling for the Police to take the lead in gathering covert video evidence are the very same people who know full well that it is not possible for the Police to obtain the required RIPA authority because the offences are not classed as 'serious'. With this knowledge their faux support for the investigation of raptor persecution cases will, in reality, ensure that no video evidence can be made available to support a prosecution unless the current legislation is changed. At no point following the collapse of the trial did anyone from the shooting industry demand changes to RIPA that would enable the Police to take the action that the industry was proposing. Nor were there any calls to allow the evidence obtained by the RSPB to be made available to the courts. Any reasonable, responsible person could be forgiven for thinking that the shooting industry would welcome the evidence gathered by the RSPB on the basis that it rids the industry of the criminals within their ranks who bring the whole industry in to disrepute. This is not the first time that similar protestations about the RSPB have been made in analogous circumstances and I predict that they will not be the last.

In this context it is important to remember that these same shooting industry representatives who are making these criticisms are the same individuals who sit on the RPPDG.

Theoretically they are 'partners' there to help the Group to find solutions to prevent bird of prey crimes, to detect them, and then successfully prosecute individuals who are responsible for them. At least that is the theory; in reality the very opposite is true. It is self-evident that there needs to be root and branch reform of the RPPDG. Whether the Police or Defra have the will or the determination to tackle the issues is another matter altogether.

On behalf of NERF I would like to place on the record our thanks to the RSPB Investigations Team, the officers in the case from Lancashire Police and the CPS for the diligence and the determination that they exhibited in the investigation of this very serious and difficult case.

Throughout the past year NERF has continued to reject the disgraceful Defra / Natural England Hen Harrier Brood Management Plan. The idea that a second clutch of eggs or a second brood of chicks located within the same 314 km<sup>2</sup> as the first clutch can be removed and reared in captivity before being released in their natal area, on a grouse moor, at the start of the grouse shooting season is abhorrent. This so called 'Plan' is being proposed as a solution to the fact that Hen Harriers continue to be persecuted to the point of extinction as a breeding species on land predominately managed for driven grouse shooting. The Government should be increasing resources to detect crimes against Hen Harriers rather than funding this ludicrous scheme, which will only benefit the already wealthy and heavily subsidised grouse moor owners.

The plight of Hen Harriers on driven grouse shooting estates was highlighted four years ago by Dr Mark Avery when he organised the first 'Hen Harrier Day' event in the Peak District National Park. Despite the atrocious weather the event was a tremendous success and similar events have been held annually across the country.

In England the vast majority of cases of Hen Harrier persecution take place on moorland in the NERF Raptor Study Area. Hen Harriers are undoubtedly the most threatened raptor species in England; however NERF members are fully aware from decades of research that many other species suffer the same fate. Peregrine Falcons, Goshawks, Red Kites and Short-eared Owls are all under-represented in their natural habitats on driven grouse moors. To emphasise this extensive problem, on Saturday 11th August 2018 NERF launched a 'Raptor Persecution Awareness Raising Open Day' at Grassington, in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The event, supported by approximately 100 delegates, was a tremendous success. We heard from Chief Inspector Louise Hubble, Head of the National Wildlife Crime Unit; Sgt Grainger, North Yorkshire Police Rural Crime Unit; James Bray, RSPB Bowland Project Officer; Ian Court, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority; Rhodri Thomas, Peak District National Park Authority and Guy Shorrocks, RSPB Senior Investigations Officer. Each of the speakers spoke with passion and expressed their determination to work tirelessly to bring an end to raptor persecution.

NERF was formed to '*Speak for raptors with one voice*'. Year upon year we hear from the spin doctors of the shooting industry that its members are the custodians of the countryside and that raptor persecution, if it occurs at all, is caused by 'a few bad apples'. However, statistics tell a different story. The industry is predicated on widespread criminality and the 'voice' of raptors needs to be heard loud and clear. Stop the killing.

NERF believes that the Government needs to introduce a system of licensing for game shooting and that the system should be vigorously policed. Whilst licensing may not eradicate birds of prey persecution the deterrent effect will have a significant, positive impact for many species. NERF is also calling for the introduction of an offence of 'vicarious liability' to be applied to game shoot owners and managers in the event that their employees are found guilty of a bird of prey-related criminal offence.

There is a tremendous amount of work to do to protect birds of prey and NERF stands ready to meet the challenges ahead.

Steve Downing

*NERF Chairman  
August 2018*



## Secretary's Report



This is the ninth Annual Review published by NERF and at its core we once again report on the combined results of the extensive fieldwork of our volunteer members. The data is wholly derived from long running field studies by experienced observers and provides a comprehensive, evidence-based picture of the breeding success of raptors in the northern uplands. The data we collate is used in species' and habitat conservation and protection and to inform the debates that surround these issues.

The extent of NERF's geographic coverage is explained in the pages that follow. Further information of our activities and composition can be found on our website [www.raptorforum.co.uk](http://www.raptorforum.co.uk), which also includes contact details.

In March 2018 Paul Irving, who had chaired and led the Forum since its inception in 2006, retired from the post. Paul was resolute and determined in all he did to promote and represent the well-being of raptors in our region. Steve Downing was unanimously voted in as our new chairman in March 2018. In addition to advisory members from the RSPB, Natural England and Rare Breeding Birds Panel we now also welcome an advisor from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to our meetings.



*Presentation of a Certificate of Appreciation to retiring Chairman, Paul Irving*

Since the last report, dated August 2017, our website has included a number of important policy and public position statements from NERF reflecting the shared views of members on matters of concern. Topics covered and responded to have included:-

- the publication of the RSPB's Bird Crime report for 2016
- the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group , persecution maps for England & Wales
- the public petition to licence driven grouse shooting
- Defra's announcement of plans for Hen Harrier brood management
- the current status of the Peak District bird of prey initiative
- the results of the 2014 national Peregrine Falcon breeding survey
- the 2018 cohort of English Hen Harrier

In August 2018, NERF organised a very successful "Raptor Persecution Awareness Open Day" event in Grassington, Yorkshire Dales. We are grateful to all those who came to lend their support and voice and are pleased to record our special thanks to guest speakers from the Yorkshire Dales NPA, the Peak District NPA, the police's National Wildlife Crime Unit , North Yorkshire Police and the RSPB.

Last year's North of England Raptor Conference was hosted by Northumbria Ringing Group and held at Northumbria University in November. A range of excellent speakers helped deliver an informative and enjoying event. Presentations covered included Osprey, Golden Eagle, Red Kite, Vole population dynamics, forestry and the work of the Northumberland National Park. We would like to thank those organisations who sponsored the conference – Paramo Clothing, the Forestry Commission, Northumbria Water, the North Tyneside Bird Club, RSPB and the Northumberland NPA.

Our work as a specialist contractor to the RSPB Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project continues with field observations made on year-round movements, winter roosting and possible spring and summer nesting attempts.

David Raw  
*Secretary to NERF*  
*August 2018*

## **NERF : geographical coverage**

### **Bowland Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland area of Bowland AONB.

The Bowland Raptor Study Group's area largely coincides with the boundary of the Forest of Bowland AONB, which in turn is roughly marked out by the M6 to the west, the Lune valley to the north, the A65 to the east and the A59 to the south. The group's main interests lie with the monitoring of upland birds of prey, including Hen Harrier, Merlin and Peregrine, with additional interest in Barn Owls on the low ground. To this end, much of the monitoring effort is focused on the moorland areas of Bowland.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

Covers some, or all, of the following grid squares: SD91, 92, 93; SE01,02,03 and SE11,12. Effectively the southern border in the M62, with the Worth valley in the north. In the east the Group covers Brighouse (between Bradford in the north and Huddersfield in the south). The western border is the Pennine county boundary with Lancashire.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** the county of Cheshire and Wirral, adjoining with PDRMG up to Macclesfield Forest in the east, and MRG in the north.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** In this report the Durham Upland Bird Study Group's comments refer principally to the Durham uplands [defined here as the North Pennine SPA and adjoining valley systems all lying generally west of the Easting NZ10 up to the county boundaries with Northumberland, Cumbria and North Yorkshire]. Where appropriate, comments are also made on the status of species throughout the Durham recording area as determined by the county ornithological society, the Durham Bird Club.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole county plus the rest of 10km squares SD50,51,61,71,81,91; SE00; SJ59,78,88,98 into which part of the county falls (with effect from 1st September 2016).

The area is bounded on the north and west by Lancashire and Merseyside, on the north east by Calderdale, in the east by Kirklees, in the south east by Derbyshire and by Cheshire in the south and south-west.

The group's main focus is on Peregrines and Barn Owls.

Data submitted includes records from [www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com)

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

The group is active throughout the county of Northumberland. The data in this report primarily refers to the Cheviot uplands, the Kielder Forest, the Border Forest, and a small section of eastern Cumbria around Kershope where the forested area straddles the county boundary.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole National Park area.

The area covered by the NYM Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group includes the upland areas, gills, dales, forests, farmland and coastal stretch within the boundaries of the North York Moors National Park.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

The PDRMG covers the Derbyshire Peak District, including the Goyt Valley and the Macclesfield Forest, including the low-lying areas. Glossop forms the western boundary, and the north-east of the Peak Park is bounded by Huddersfield, Sheffield, Barnsley and Wakefield. The Group does not cover the limestone areas within the Peak Park, nor Derwent Dale. Website: [www.pdrmg.co.uk](http://www.pdrmg.co.uk)

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:**

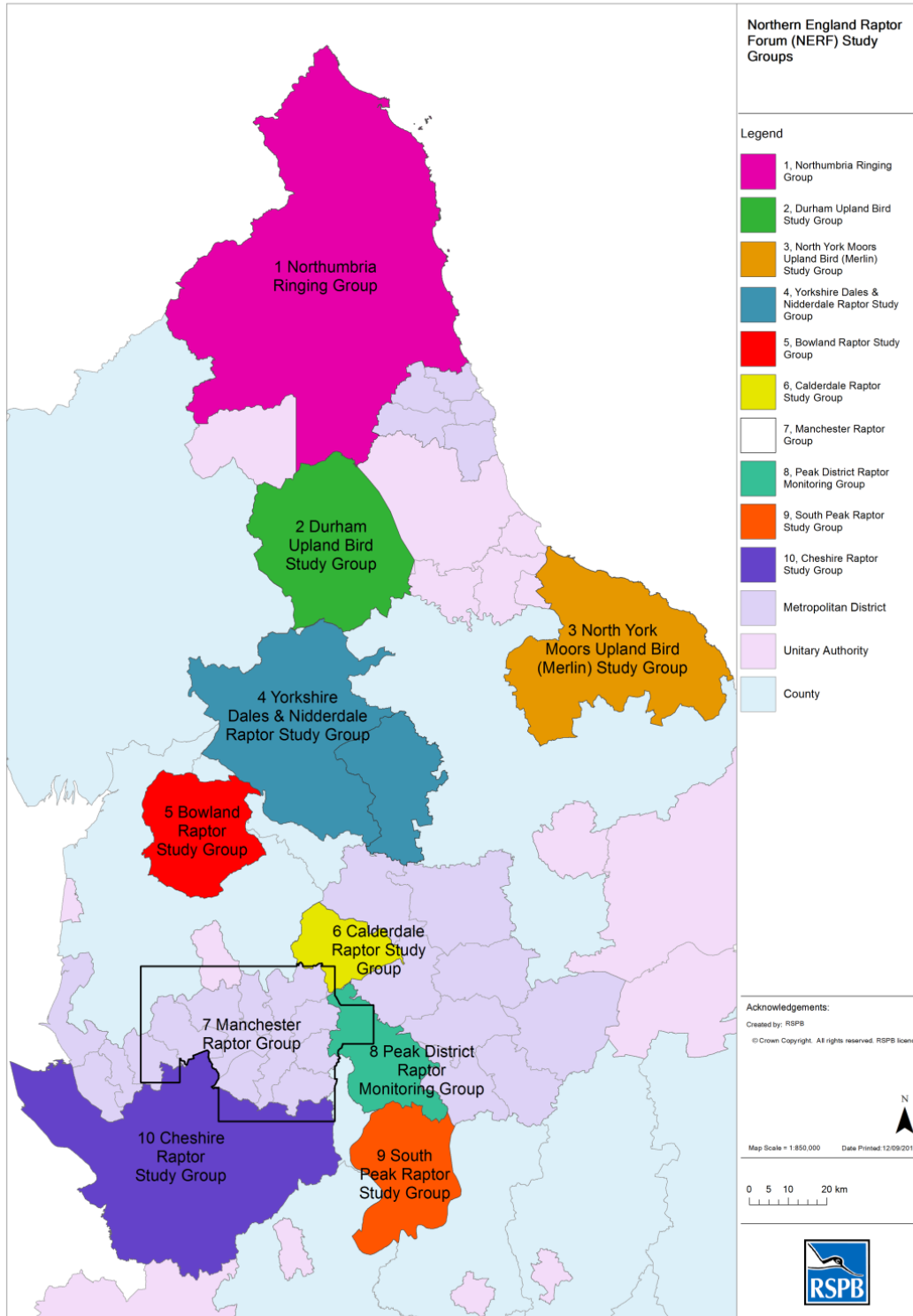
*In the north:* National Trust land in the upper Derwent valley, west to the R. Alport and east to the National Trust boundary.

*In the south:* all of the White Peak, with the exception of the Goyt valley. Includes the Staffordshire Moors, Eastern Moors, North Lees Estate, Chatsworth Estate and the Haddon

Estate. In addition the Group covers central Derbyshire as far as the Nottinghamshire border and south Derbyshire (mainly Hobby).

### Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Covers the central Pennine block from the southern boundary between Skipton, Harrogate and Otley, and west to the Cumbria and Lancashire boundaries.



## Annual Review

The Northern England Raptor Forum was formed in 2006 to collate the results of fieldwork on raptors being undertaken across the northern uplands by member groups. We speak with one collective voice for the protection and conservation of birds of prey. Members survey all 23 species of raptors, owls and Raven (an honorary raptor) occurring in or on passage through our region.

Whilst the terrain may be sometimes challenging and often remote, the following species accounts show clearly that our volunteer fieldworkers manage to study the majority of key species in considerable depth. Many of these studies have been on-going for decades and serve to provide valuable information on long term population trends. Our focus is on Schedule 1 species where members operate under appropriate licences but we also recognise the need where possible to provide information on the other, more common species.

The breeding season really presents quite a small window of opportunity each season so resource and particularly time constraints mean that priority must be given to some species over others.

We attempt to provide as much detailed information as possible for Schedule 1 species and some others. The extent and area of coverage for each group's survey work should be read in conjunction with the figures presented in species account tables. A "0" (Zero) is shown where the column feature was known with confidence to be zero for the area surveyed having regard to the extent of coverage indicated. Examples include species that definitely did not occur, or perhaps where no pairs laid eggs or fledged young. "NC" ( Not Counted) is shown in any column where the feature occurred but the number was not known – probably because it was not monitored in detail. The NC notation should not be interpreted to conclude that the species does not occur in the study area.

Similar criteria apply to the persecution data. The numbers in the persecution pie-chart refer only to evidence-based cases recorded by members in respect of both "species" and "type of persecution" categories. These figures are by no means absolute, they simply reflect the incidents that group members have experienced. Equally the absence of persecution incidents shouldn't be interpreted that no persecution occurred.

## NERF regional species monitoring

Given that the membership of each constituent Group of NERF has historically consisted of a small number of dedicated volunteers the volume of monitoring undertaken across the NERF region is quite remarkable.

The chart on p.14 graphically indicates the level of monitoring undertaken by NERF. Analyses of the species 'breeding & monitored' / 'breeding & not monitored' / 'absent' / 'passage' data, identify the areas in which NERF will be able to focus future monitoring efforts more effectively. This will provide an opportunity to expand the overall dataset in a more meaningful way. This improved dataset, when combined with the persecution dataset will be used to set and / or modify NERF's monitoring priorities over time.

In 2011 the Rare Breeding Birds Panel [RBBP] added Long-eared Owl and Short-eared Owl to its list of species that are believed to have a population of less than 1500 breeding pairs in the UK and are therefore deserving of more extensive monitoring. With regard to the expanse of suitable habitat within the NERF region it is possible that these species are under-recorded; if not, they may be under threat. In either case both species merit increased attention by all upland Raptor Workers.

Further information and advice in relation to the criteria for categorising breeding evidence for both species can be found on the RBBP website at [www.rbbp.org.uk](http://www.rbbp.org.uk)

## Species monitored by NERF

GROUP																					
BRSR																					
CaRSG																					
ChRSG																					
DUBSG																					
MRG																					
NRG																					
NYM RSG																					
PDRMG																					
SPRSG																					
YD&N RSG																					
	<i>Honey-buzzard</i>	<i>Red Kite</i>	<i>Marsh Harrier</i>	<i>Hen Harrier,</i>	<i>Montagu's Harrier</i>	<i>Northern Goshawk</i>	<i>Sparrowhawk</i>	<i>Common Buzzard</i>	<i>Rough-legged Buzzard</i>	<i>Osprey</i>	<i>Barn Owl</i>	<i>Eagle Owl</i>	<i>Little Owl</i>	<i>Tawny Owl</i>	<i>Long-eared Owl</i>	<i>Short-eared Owl</i>	<i>Kestrel</i>	<i>Merlin</i>	<i>Hobby</i>	<i>Peregrine</i>	<i>Raven</i>

	Breeding* and monitored
	Breeding* but not monitored
	Absent
	Non-breeding; Passage movements monitored

Note: \*Breeding attempted at least once in last 10 years

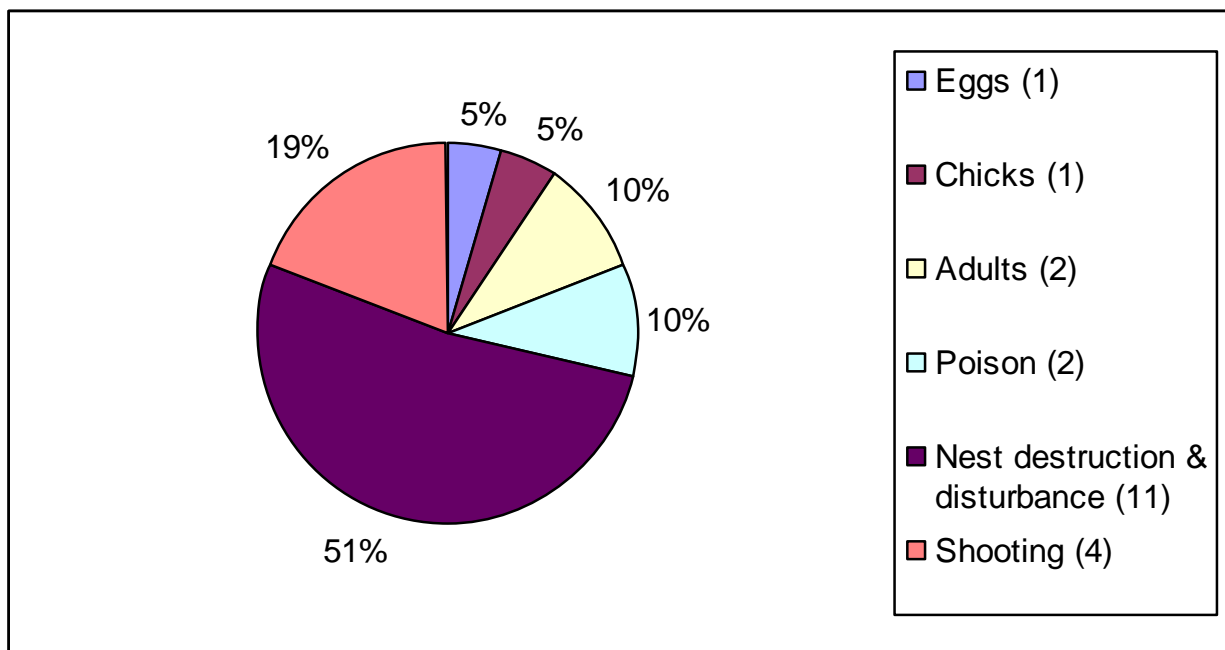
## NERF regional persecution data

Of all the data gathered by Raptor Workers the number of persecution cases consistently invokes discussions in relation to the claims. Proven persecution is relatively easy to assert in cases where birds have been shot or poisoned or in cases where traps have been recovered adjacent to nests.

It is self-evident that claims of persecution would be contentious where birds are reported to have “disappeared” from a given location, perhaps during the breeding season. A similar situation arises when the absence of a particular species from a given area, where there is ample suitable habitat and prey, cannot be explained unless human interference is the cause. No matter how contentious these issues are, it is the responsibility of Raptor Workers to raise their concerns in the public domain. It is then a matter for others to make evidence-based challenges to the assertion that persecution is affecting several species, particularly in areas associated with game shooting rather than to simply state that it does not occur.

The total of incidents in 2017 fell to 21, the lowest ever recorded. However, caution must be exercised. In 2015 a decision was taken, in conjunction with the RSPB, to record incidents only where persecution was known to have taken place, rather than where it was strongly suspected but could not be proved. Therefore only incidents reported to the police or RSPB Investigations are included below.

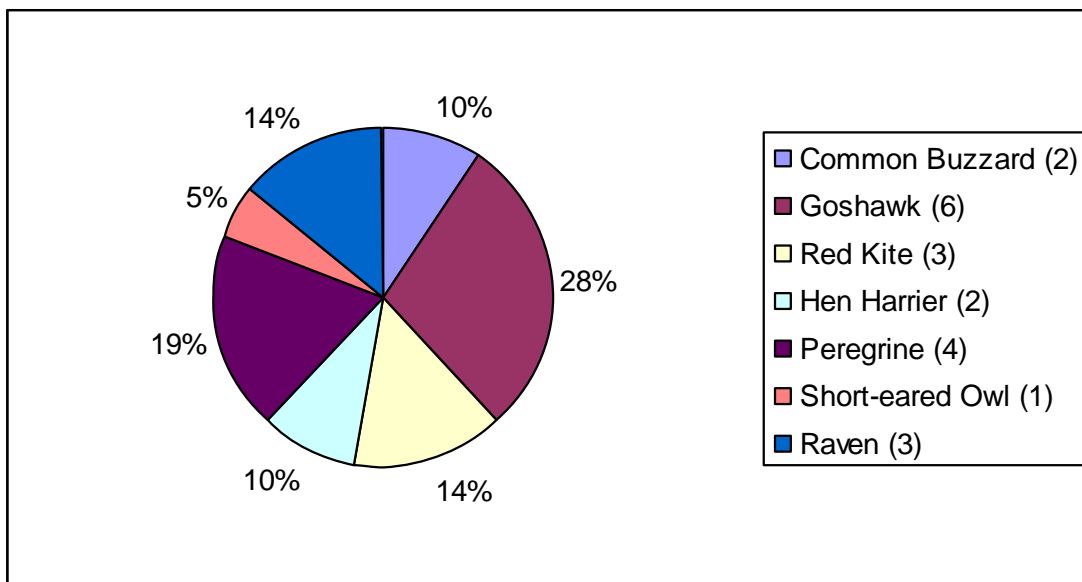
### Persecution by type 2017 *(figures in parentheses refer to number of incidents)*



## Black Hole species

During 2017 NERF members analysed the various habitats within their respective study areas with a view to identifying “Black Hole Species”, i.e. those habitats where there is ample suitable habitat and food supply but where the relevant species are absent or occur at levels well below those experienced in similar habitats. The pie chart indicates the species and the number of NERF member Groups experiencing reduced populations.

### Black Hole species in 2017 (*figures in parentheses refer to number of groups listing species*)



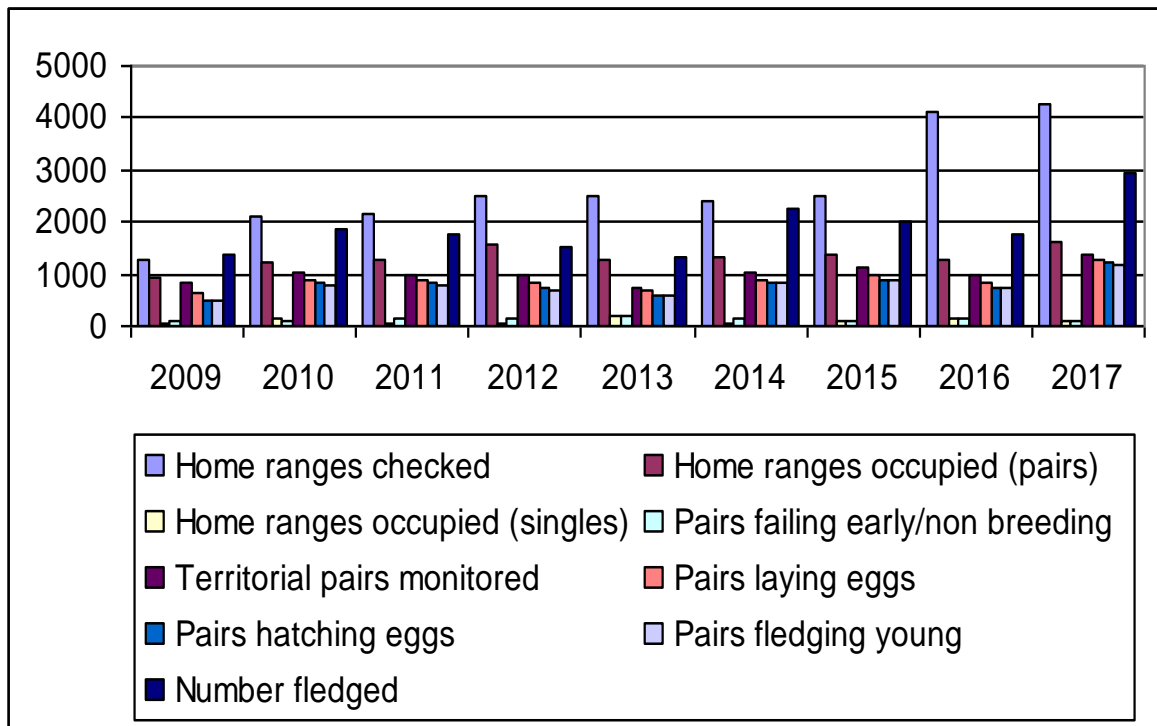
## Summary

Within the NERF region 19 raptor species were monitored and / or recorded by Group members during 2017. Additionally this year, there were records for Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard and a new species for NERF, Pallid Harrier. None of these bred, but a short section on them is included after the main Species Reports section, where full details of work undertaken with the 19 monitored species can be found. For quick reference the combined data for all of the species has been collated into a single table. See Appendix 1.

For ease of comparison the overall statistics for 2009 - 2017 are presented in the table following.



## Combined statistics 2009-2017



2017 was the most successful year since NERF's inception, with the highest number of Home Ranges Checked (4274), Home Ranges Occupied (1613), Territorial Pairs Monitored (1357), Pairs Laying Eggs (1275), Pairs Hatching Eggs (1208), Pairs Fledging Young (1191) and Numbers Fledged (2928). Whilst the number of Home Ranges Checked can only realistically be compared with 2016 (4101), due to the large number of Barn Owl territories checked by Cheshire RSG, who joined in that year, it still showed a 4% increase in 2017. Pairs Failing Early/Non-breeding were the lowest since 2010 at 100. Perhaps most gratifying was the Number Fledged, at 2928 compared with 1755 in 2016 – only in 2014, at 2237, have numbers broken the 2000 mark.

The dry, mild spring, followed by reasonable summer weather, resulting in high rodent prey levels, was the main reason for this excellent breeding season. A comparison between 2016 and 2017 shows that in 2016, 12.4% of pairs laying eggs did not hatch them, whereas in 2017 this number was down to 5.2%. Similarly, the number hatching eggs but not fledging young was down to 1.41% compared with 3.1% in 2016.

Appendices 2(a) and 2(b) show young fledged per pair laying and per territorial pair monitored.

There is always more work to do and lack of personnel prevents most groups from monitoring the commoner species. Anyone interested in joining one of the Groups should contact the relevant Group representative. Contact details are provided on the inside back cover.

# Species reports

## Editor's note:

Please note that the species are now arranged in BOU order. This changed (yet again) in January 2018.

<http://www.bou.org.uk/british-list/>

The Contents List still arranges them alphabetically, for easy reference.

In 2017, unusually, there were sightings by members of all the rarer NERF species, with the addition of a new one, Pallid Harrier. None of these bred, but it was felt worthwhile to add a separate section after the main body of species accounts.

## Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*



### UK population estimate

218-250 breeding pairs were estimated in the UK in 2016 by RBBP and, of these, 16 pairs bred in England and fledged 33 young. (Holling, M. *et al.* 2018 *in press*). APEP 3 estimates 200-250 pairs, 2006-10 (Musgrove *et al.* 2013, APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013) The Bird Atlas 2007-11 found an increase of 68% since the last atlas (1988-91) with expansion into northern England and Wales and a successful relocation programme at Rutland Water.

### Conservation status

UK: **Amber**  
European: 3: Concern, most not in Europe; rare  
Global: Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Listed as Near Threatened (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110 September 2017).

### National and regional threat assessment

Disturbance at the nest site remains the most significant threat to breeding birds. Unlike most other birds of prey, Ospreys are not shy, regularly hunting near fishermen; their nests are big and nesting birds are very obvious. The interest in and enthusiasm for Ospreys by the public can in itself pose a threat of inadvertent disturbance. Discussion with land managers is very important to mitigate these risks.

As the species extends its breeding range within the NERF region, there will be an increased requirement for members to monitor nests and provide advice to landowners to reduce any potential conflicts.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
NRG	4	4	0	0	4	4	4	4	10	2.50	2.50

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Several Ospreys are seen each year in Bowland in both spring and summer, with the odd individual spending a few days at Stocks Reservoir each year.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Ospreys are only observed as a passage migrant crossing the study area in spring and autumn. In 2017 4 individuals were recorded on their northern migration route and a single bird was observed heading south in August.

### Cheshire Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Numbers of birds frequent the Cheshire Meres in spring and late summer migration. Some birds occasionally stay for up to 3 to 4 days whilst gaining weight and to achieve breeding condition.

### Durham Upland Bird Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

Spring and autumn return passage reports were concentrated in the east of the county. 1-3 birds again lingered during the summer around a northern reservoir without any indications of breeding.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

There were 25 sightings in spring, more than twice as many as in 2016, beginning earlier (March 21st) and ending later (May 27th). Return passage involved 7 sightings, 6 of which were in August, with the last being 12th September.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole county.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

2017 was another good year for the Northumbrian Osprey population, although productivity fell slightly with 3 chicks dying pre-fledging, and another presumed lost after its first flight. For the 2nd year in succession there were 4 successful nests. One pair had a clutch of 4 eggs for the 2nd time, but only 2 chicks survived to fledge. The other nests produced broods of 3, 3 and 2, going on to fledge 3, 2 and 1.

As usual there were a number of intruding Ospreys around the nesting pairs. Nine different birds were identified by their colour rings, with other unringed birds seen as well.

As in previous years, other birds were recorded summering in the county, but as yet with no signs of breeding.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Normally a passage migrant recorded with some frequency particularly at the two attractive reservoirs in the study area - Lockwood Beck and Scaling Dam. These two sites receive very thorough coverage throughout the year, principally from members of the Teesmouth Bird Club. However, only 3 sightings were recorded in 2017 in the NYM, 2 of these occurring at Lockwood Beck.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

PDRMG recorded several sightings of Osprey in spring and autumn.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Ospreys are seen quite frequently in the spring and the autumn months, and the increase in populations around the UK results in sight records throughout the study area. Although Ospreys did not breed in the Peak District in 2017, there continue to be signs that colonisation may soon occur and action is being taken to try to encourage this.

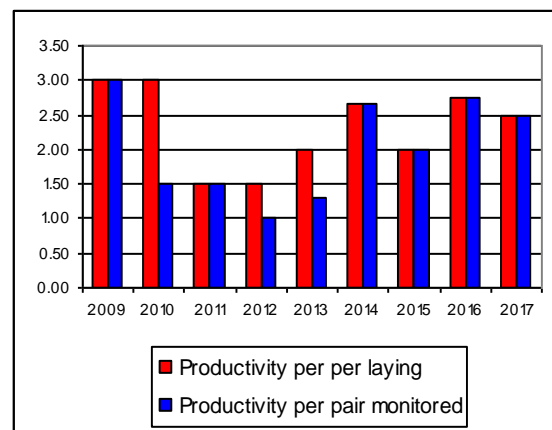
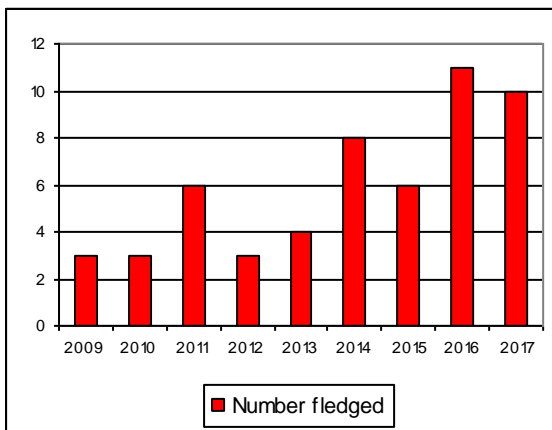
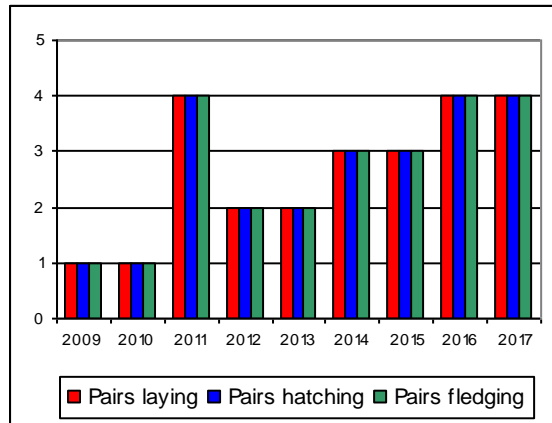
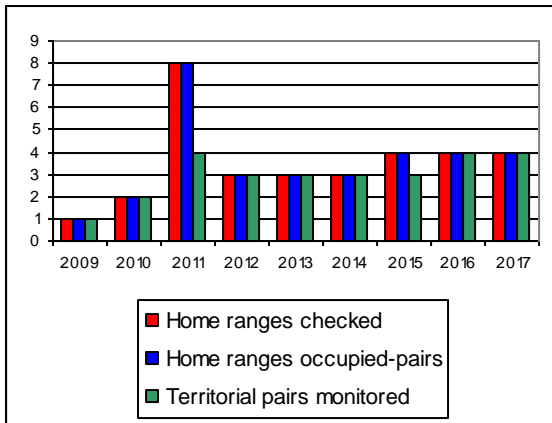
### **NERF regional summary**

As usual, Northumberland was the only NERF area with breeding birds; 4 pairs at Kielder had another good breeding season fledging 10 chicks. These included the 50th fledgling for this population since its establishment in 2009.

Elsewhere most other NERF regions saw migrating Ospreys in spring and autumn, although in North Yorkshire at Scaling Dam and Lockwood Beck the number of sightings was lower than has come to be expected. With more Ospreys now in the NERF area and the erection of

a number of artificial platforms, it must surely only be a matter of time before the population extends its range and colonises new areas.

### Comparative data 2009-2017



## Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*



### UK population estimate

22-35 pairs, but the population could be more than double this total as there are large areas of Britain where no-one is looking for this secretive nester. (Holling, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2016 *in press.*)

Roberts, S.J. & Law, C., in their paper on Honey-Buzzards in Britain (*British Birds* 2014 107: 668-691) estimated the national population to be in the region of between 100-150 pairs.

### Conservation status

UK:	Amber
Europe:	Not of concern
Global:	Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Listed as Endangered (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110: September 2017).

### National and regional threat assessment

The only threats to the continuing well-being of these birds stem from the attentions of egg collectors and the damaging effects of wet and cold spring/summer weather. The latter conditions can decimate bee and wasp nests that provide the major food source for the species over the nesting season.

Those gamekeepers who can differentiate between Common and Honey-buzzards present no problem to the latter and as carrion-feeding by the species is virtually unheard of, poisoning presents no threat.

Migration to and from Africa holds inherent and obvious risks, of course, but passage of UK birds via Gibraltar provides a much safer route than the gun-threat alternative across the central Mediterranean.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
NYMUBSG	9	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
SPRSG	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	1.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>

## Group Reports

### North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage: at least two monitoring studies.

A disappointing season. Seven individuals, 4 males, 3 females were recorded across the usual territories. The male who bred successfully at the 2016 site returned for his 10th season in succession but was not seen subsequently. Elsewhere at one site, a complex series of sightings occurred from the 3rd week in June involving 6 different birds none of which had been recorded in the past so possibly youngsters. One bird, a particularly pale male displayed for hours on end over several weeks through to mid-August often in company with the other males and females there. However, there was never any indication of pairing-up witnessed and certainly no observations to suggest nesting activity anywhere across the study area.

### South Peak Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Normally a rare passage migrant, but a pair bred in 2017 the first breeding record for Derbyshire; one youngster fledged in mid-September.

There were no reports of birds from any of the other Groups.

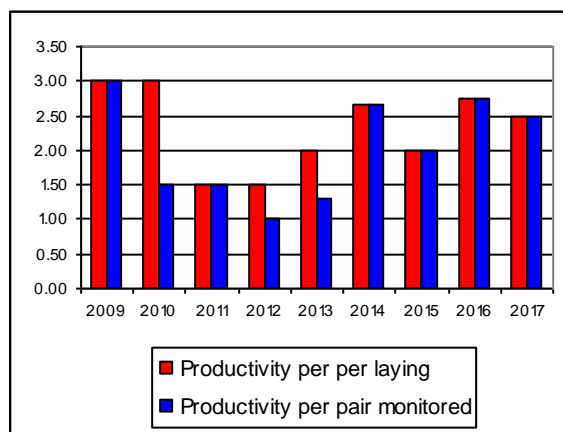
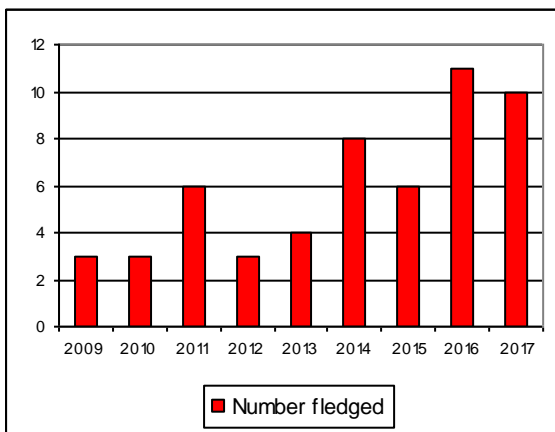
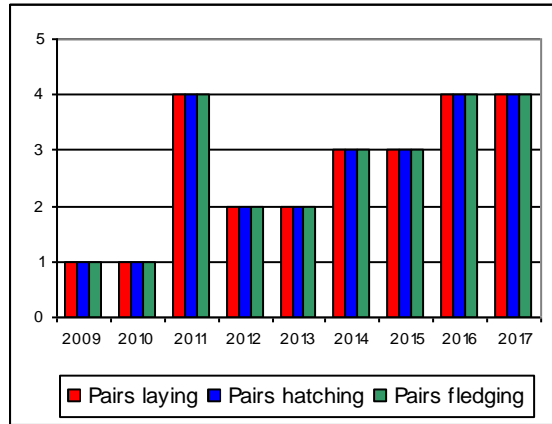
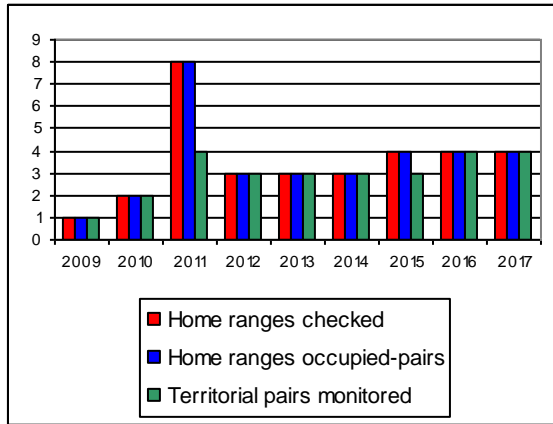
## NERF regional summary

It is very pleasing to be able to report on a nesting success of this species elsewhere in the NERF reporting area. Hopefully the location of the breeding pair in Derbyshire will stimulate future fieldwork directed to the species there. As far as the North York Moors population is



concerned intensive observations carried out over the season across the study area once again failed to produce any evidence of breeding and did nothing to dispel fieldworkers' concerns that a continuing decline is in progress.

### Comparative data 2009-2017



## Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*



### UK population estimate

In 2013 the population was estimated at 33000-35000 pairs (Musgrove *et al.* 2013. APEP 3 *British Birds* 106: February 2013). The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey report for 2017 in England showed a 3% decrease 2016-17, a 27% decrease 2006-16 and overall a 25% decrease in the period 1995-2016.

### National and regional threat assessment

Sparrowhawk chicks can be predated by both pine marten and larger raptors such as Goshawk, Buzzard and Tawny Owl. The increase in Buzzard numbers appears to be having an impact at a localised level. Prolonged cold and wet weather also has an adverse effect on the species.

There are two further issues that result in localised threats; firstly, there is a belief amongst some pigeon fanciers that Sparrowhawks are responsible for high mortality rates in some lofts, and secondly there is the erroneous belief, held by some people, that the Sparrowhawk is responsible for the long-term declines in songbird populations. As a result of these beliefs there are calls from some quarters for the Sparrowhawk population to be controlled, although there is very little scientific evidence to support these allegations.

### Conservation status

UK:	Green
European:	Not of concern
Global:	Least concern

Listed as Near Threatened (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110 September 2017).

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
MRG	39	11	NC	NC	11	9	9	9	11+	1.22*	1.00*
NRG	34	27	0	1	22	22	16	15	35	1.60	1.60
PDRMG	11	7	NC	2	5	5	4	4	10	2.00	2.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>56+</b>	<b>1.56*</b>	<b>1.47*</b>

\* Understated calculation: does not take into account nests where young fledged but numbers were not known. See group text below for more details.

## Group Reports

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

Over 200 reports of this species were received during 2017 from across the study area.

However, no systematic monitoring took place due to members concentrating on other species. Breeding was suspected at 3 locations where birds were seen entering woodland carrying prey. Display flights were also recorded in spring at 2 additional sites. With thousands of hectares of suitable habitat available and from previous breeding history of the species in the study area there is no doubt that several pairs would have bred successfully. Casual observations of predatory flights included the pursuit of Blue Tit, Collared Dove, Pigeon and Starling.

### Manchester Raptor Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

273 records were received from members or garnered from [www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com), involving 112 sites. An analysis of these suggested territories at 39 locations, with confirmed breeding at 11 of these. At 9 of the 11, it was known that some young fledged, with pairs

recorded sitting at the other two. However, the actual number of young was only known at 4 nests, totalling 11 young, (with 1+ young at the remaining 5 nests). Figures in the final two columns of the table are therefore based on 11 young divided by the 4 recorded nests. The height of the nests, in what are sometimes insubstantial trees, militates against accurate recording.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part of upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

There are now 2 good study areas for Sparrowhawk in the NRG area: the Border Forest Kielder, and Slaley Forest which is now in its 3rd year. It is very encouraging that there is this interest in this poorly studied species.

*Border Forest Kielder:* 20 home ranges were occupied (14 in 2016). At least 16 pairs laid eggs, and 12 nests hatched young, fledging 28 young (11 young in 2016).

One attempt failed due to the nest collapsing, and at another the chicks were predated by a Goshawk.

*Slaley Forest:* this study had 7 home ranges occupied (5 in 2016); 6 pairs laid eggs and 4 nests fledged 7 young, the same as 2016. Two nests failed as the timber blocks containing the nest were either felled completely, or in the 2nd case very close to the nest. Both had small chicks which died from exposure when the adults deserted.

All the nests in 2017 were located in Sitka spruce and it was noted that the nests in the lower part of the forest have a higher success rate. Interestingly, the raptor worker has only had one nest within 1km of the moorland edge.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

Other commitments resulted in a lower than usual effort expended on this relatively common species. However, work continued as usual in the long-term study site in South Yorkshire, where 6 nests were occupied. Two pairs failed before laying, one pair failed at the egg stage and 3 nests were successful.

### **NERF regional summary**

The Sparrowhawk remains widespread across the NERF region as a breeding species, but the species is not monitored as a matter of course by most of the NERF member groups.

The number of groups checking home ranges further reduced in 2017 compared to previous years.

Due to the species being relatively common throughout the NERF region and the limited manpower within the raptor groups, the Sparrowhawk has in recent years been rather overlooked, with regards to detailed monitoring. The apparent number of unoccupied home ranges and nationally reported decrease in abundance highlights that this species could be worthy of further investigation by NERF members.

## Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*



### UK population estimate

The 473-705 pairs reported to RBBP in 2016 maintained the increase reported last year. (Holling, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2016 *in press*). This is well in excess of the latest population estimate from APEP: 280-420 pairs, 2006-2010 (Musgrove *et al.* 2013, APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013).

### Conservation status

UK:           Green  
European:   Not of concern  
Global:       Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Listed as Near Threatened (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110: September 2017)

### National and regional threat assessment

The Goshawk faces many threats to its slowly expanding population in the NERF area, as well as nationally, with forestry operations and recreation of growing concern in some areas. The former can be overcome by discussions with forest operators, and, as demonstrated on the continent, most notably in a park in central Berlin, Goshawks are a very adaptable species quite able to live alongside people. But by far and away the biggest problem the Goshawk populations have is human interference. As shown by the NERF data, populations only exist in the more heavily forested areas, often on the higher ground, not on the more accessible lowland areas, which would be much more productive. Tracking studies on these birds have been carried out in East Anglia by the BTO since 2016: this and a currently more expansive and longer-running Scottish study are revealing much about post-fledging behaviour, habitat use and dispersal.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRG	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
ChRSG	3	3	0	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	-	-
DUBSG	7	3	1	3	3	NC	NC	NC	NC	-	-
NRG	61	37	6	5	32	31	25	24	42	1.35	1.31
PDRMG	13	6	2	2	4	1	1	1	3	3.00	0.75
SPRSG	19	19	0	0	19	15	14	14	28	1.87	1.47
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>1.55</b>	<b>1.26</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

No reliable sightings were recorded at the main site that this species used to breed in.

Although much tree felling has occurred in this area, there is plenty of suitable nesting habitat remaining. The disappearance of this species is almost certainly down to persecution.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Despite the fact that there are large areas of eminently suitable habitat available in both woodland and on the moorland fringe, Goshawks are rarely seen in Calderdale. There were only 3 acceptable sightings of the species during 2017, down one from 2016. The sightings were from 3 different locations; one in each of March, August and December. For many years there have been annual rumours of display flights in spring, none of which is known to have resulted in a breeding attempt. The sightings in August and December were of individuals passing through the study area.

### Cheshire Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage: casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Access problems in one forest area prevented the follow-up of a pair there.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term study.

Monitoring effort was increased substantially in the main study area with over 25 lengthy visits made between late February and the end of July. Despite this, very little spring display was observed and there was no confirmation of breeding of 2 probable pairs seen in April. The extra effort merely seemed to confirm the diminished status of Goshawk, even from the very modest levels of 5 years ago. Elsewhere limited spring display was noted at 2 other locations.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part of upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

*Northumberland:* A slight improvement was recorded in the Goshawk population in 2017.

37 Home Ranges were occupied in the continuing Northumbria study. Of these pairs, 31 laid eggs, and 24 successfully fledged 42 chicks.

Another 6 territories held single birds, some of which were aged as 1st year birds, so may not have been attempting to nest.

The Northumbria RG would like to thank the Forestry Commission for their continuing support with the timing of forest operations during the nesting season.

*Cumbria:* Four home ranges were checked but only one was found to be occupied; this pair failed on eggs. The birds had been evicted from their normal territory by a pair of Buzzards, although they still nested in the same block of trees. In another territory a single bird was seen, but no nest was ever found.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

The fieldworkers who monitor this species do not wish to have the population figures published. Following on from the suspicious 2016 failure of 3 normally successful nests in one particular forest lying adjacent to a grouse moor where a change of shooting tenancy had recently occurred, these sites were again unsuccessful this season. In total 7 nests failed across the study area apparently due to illegal disturbance and these incidents are currently being investigated.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

Six pairs of Goshawk were recorded in the PDRMG study area in 2017 (other than those referred to below by the SPRSG); sadly only one pair was successful fledging three young.

Successful Goshawk nesting attempts remain very low in the study area. With no obvious alternative explanation for the disparity in both occupied sites and breeding success, compared with other neighbouring populations and historic populations, this seems to leave no doubt that illegal and deliberate persecution is the main cause for the continuing low breeding numbers. For more detailed analysis of breeding data for Goshawk and Peregrine in the Dark Peak see Melling, T., Thomas, M., Price, M. and Roos, S. (2018) Raptor Persecution in the Peak District National Park. *British Birds* 111, pp. 275-290.

### South Peak Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Goshawks were included as a key species in the Peak District Bird of Prey Initiative from 2016 onwards.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group covered the Upper Derwent Valley area in conjunction with South Peak Raptor Study Group in 2017. To keep the data consistent with previous years, reports from this area have been combined as follows: 4 traditional sites were monitored throughout the season; 2 sites were successful, with 6 chicks ringed in total from the 2 sites; at a 3rd site the pair failed, after eggs had been laid, and the pair failed early at the 4th site.

Elsewhere in the SPRSG recording area at least 15 sites were successfully occupied and a total of at least 22 young fledged. At 2 sites pairs bred but failed and at one site a pair was present but the outcome was unknown.

### Yorkshire Dales Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

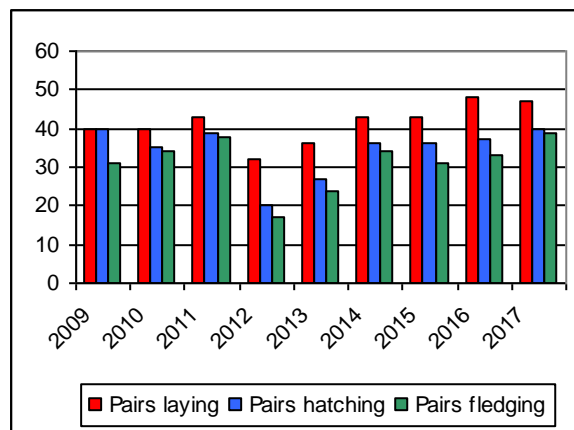
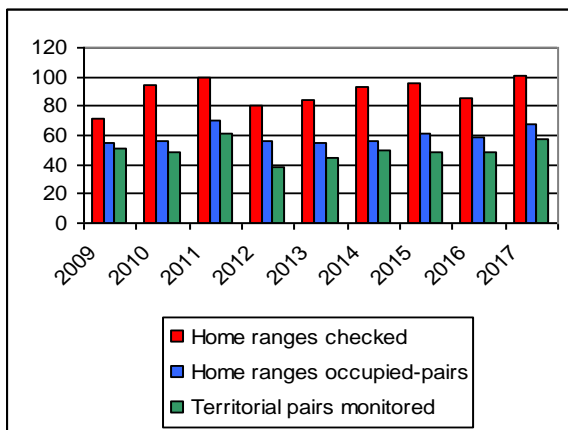
The lack of any submitted records continues to make determining the status of the species very difficult. There were reports of bird(s) at 2 sites during the year.

### NERF regional summary

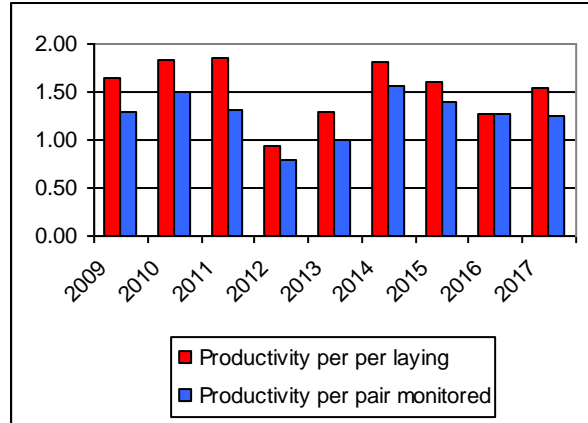
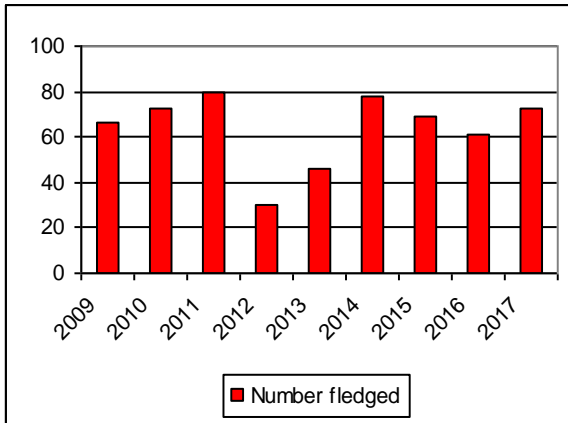
As usual, only Northumberland, North York Moors, and the Peak District groups have populations of any size. The North York Moors fieldworkers who monitor this area have again requested that their figures be withheld.

A slight increase was noted in occupied Home Ranges in both Northumberland, and the Peak District resulting in 42 and 28 chicks fledging respectively. However, this was offset by the results from other NERF members. North York Moors recorded 7 nests all failing by “illegal disturbance” and Durham recorded 25 visits to the main study area, resulting in a little spring display and 2 probable pairs. Persecution is still a major problem.

### Comparative data 2009-2017







## Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*



### UK population estimate

The latest APEP estimate is 320-380 pairs, 2006-2010 (Musgrove *et al.* 2013. APEP 3. *British Birds* 106: February 2013). 320-390 breeding pairs were reported to RBBP (Holling, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2016 *in press.*)

### Conservation status

UK: Amber  
 European: Not of concern  
 Global: Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Listed as Near Threatened (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110: September 2017).

## National and regional threat assessment

The UK population is more secure now than at any other time during the last 100 years. However, significant habitat loss could reverse this trend. As with any small population the impact of egg collecting could be locally significant. As the species moves north to breed they are likely to face an increase threat of persecution if they attempt to breed in the uplands.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
NRG	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0.00	0.00
YD&NRSG	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>

No other Group reported Marsh Harriers attempting to breed in their respective study areas.

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

In common with previous years several birds were recorded passing through the study area, although once again there was no evidence of breeding in the Bowland Fells.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

There were 4 Marsh Harrier sightings in 2016 and these increased dramatically to 10 in 2017. The majority of the sightings were of 'cream crown' females, often observed in suitable breeding habitat in the west of the study area. Unfortunately the female(s) were not present on the day when a 1st year male was seen in the same area.

One female was seen to enter the traditional Hen Harrier roost at dusk on 26th August; unfortunately there were no Hen Harriers present during that evening. However; with numbers of Marsh Harriers apparently increasing across the uplands of the North of England

it may be only a matter of time before we note a breeding attempt in Calderdale. Whether any such breeding attempt would be allowed to succeed is a matter of conjecture and may largely be dependent on where the attempt is made.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

As usual the majority of reports featured birds on spring and autumn passage, which were observed along the well watched coastal strip. Additionally records were received throughout the summer from the area around the RSPB Saltholme Reserve.

There was one report of a single bird on spring passage in April over an upland moor.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

There was a total of 24 sightings during 2017, a reduction of 10 from 2016.

On the mosslands, the year began with a female/immature flying N over Cadishead Moss 20th February. The neighbouring sites, Little Woolden Moss and Croxden peatworks reserve, then had the majority of the year's records, as usual, though there was no summering bird this year. All the records were of female/immature birds. The last sighting of the year, on November 15th was of a juvenile with pale green wing tags. These indicated the bird had been tagged as a chick in Norfolk. Unfortunately the letter and numeral on the tag were not obtained.

Sightings of passage birds came from 9 other sites, including 3 at the vismig area of Winter Hill.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

2017 was a disappointing nesting season for the only Marsh Harriers we have breeding in Northumberland. A pair settled in to the now traditional home range at the beginning of the breeding season and observations suggested that it was the same pair from 2016.

The birds nested in a new part of the reed bed laying 4 eggs about 3 weeks later than the previous year. All of the eggs subsequently hatched, but unfortunately the whole brood died later as a result of the bad weather.

There was again a good passage of Marsh Harriers through the study area so hopefully it will not be too long before we get a 2nd pair in residence.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Roaming birds were reported from several upland areas from early spring to late summer. As usual the most frequent sightings occurred at the favoured Sleddale and Scaling Dam Reservoir sites.

An interesting incident was witnessed on Egton High Moor on 23rd September when a "cream-crown" was photographed scrapping with a female Hen Harrier. The latter bird appeared to be the aggressor and the interaction lasted several minutes before the birds went their separate ways, both apparently unscathed!



The observations from the NYMs pale into insignificance in comparison to those recorded in the Tees estuary over the April to December period. Clearly the species is becoming more regular and frequent in this part of the northern England and a breeding attempt surely must be on the cards in the Tees estuary before too long. Apparently, it was suspected that nesting might have occurred at one location there in 2016.

Taking into account the number of birds that are recorded annually in the study area, but fail to breed, the Group considers the Marsh Harrier to be a ‘black hole’ species on the North York Moors.

#### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Marsh Harriers are not known to occur as a breeding species within the study area. However, several sightings of passage birds were recorded once again in both spring and autumn.

#### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

The only sighting in the SPRSG recording area, reported by one of our members, was of an autumn migrant ‘cream-crown’ flying west over Beeley Moor on 13th August.

#### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Marsh Harriers are generally recorded as passage migrants across the study area. The widely publicised breeding attempt that failed was in the Washburn area in the Nidderdale AONB (see below).

### **NERF regional summary**

Only the Northumbria Ringing Group and the Yorkshire Dales and Nidderdale RSG reported breeding attempts in 2017. However, most other NERF Groups observed passage migrants during both spring and autumn and it is self-evident from the available statistics that the species is under represented in the NERF study areas.

It is also clear from the criminal incident that occurred on Denton Moor in May 2017 that Marsh Harriers settling to breed on grouse moors in the North of England are vulnerable to persecution and in future extreme vigilance will be required to protect them.

### **The Marsh Harrier Persecution Incident Denton Moor, Nidderdale**

In May 2017 a pair of Marsh Harriers was discovered nesting on moorland forming part of Middleton and Denton moors near the village of Denton in North Yorkshire. Marsh Harriers normally breed in marshes, reed beds and oil seed rape fields and whilst it is unusual to find them breeding on heather moorland, there are increased numbers of records of birds prospecting for breeding sites in that habitat.

Following the discovery of the nest the site was monitored by RSPB investigators who initially photographed the nest containing five eggs before installing a camera to record activity at the nest site. At the time that the camera was installed both of the adult birds were observed at the nest.

Subsequent examination of the video images recorded by the camera revealed that on 17th May at least two individuals, both of whom appeared to be men wearing dull, brownish-green coloured jackets, traditional country caps and carrying what appeared to be shotguns and a brown game bag, approached the nest site on 6 occasions between 12.40pm and 9.30pm. It is clear from the video evidence that one of the men stood over the nest, bent down, and then appeared to pick up something from the nest before walking away. The sound of several shots, fired in the vicinity of the nest, were also recorded, as was the noise of an engine which is believed to have been a quad bike.

The following day, on 18th May, a man, dressed in similar clothing and carrying a green rucksack, was recorded at the nest at 9.40am. This individual stood over the nest, bent down, and appeared to remove something from the nest.

An RSPB investigator checked the site on 19th May and discovered that the nest was empty and there was no sign of any debris from damaged eggs in the vicinity of the nest.

Under Section I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 any person who intentionally:

kills, injures or takes any wild bird;

takes, damages or destroys the nest of a wild bird;

takes, damages or destroys the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or takes or destroys an egg of any wild bird

is guilty of an offence.

Marsh Harriers are listed on Schedule 1 of the WCA, which affords them additional protection, and it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb birds on this Schedule whilst they are at, or near a nest containing eggs or dependent young.

Unfortunately, the people shown on the video at the nest site remain unidentified to date.

However, the Police have interviewed a number of men as part of the investigation.

PC Bill Hickson, North Yorkshire Police Wildlife Crime Officer, who is the Investigating Officer, said: "The video evidence provided by the RSPB shows illegal activity around a Marsh Harrier nest, and the activity shown speaks for itself. The pictures on the video are, unfortunately, too small to produce an image from which any of the individuals shown could be identified."

Anyone who has any information about the incident or can help identify the people responsible is asked to contact North Yorkshire Police and pass the details to PC 820 Bill Hickson or email [bill.hickson@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:bill.hickson@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk).

## Wing-tagging project

In 2011 Phil Littler commenced a 10-year wing tagging project in Norfolk where the current population is estimated to be in excess of 100 females. By the end of the 2017 season, 381 birds in total had been fitted with green wing tags, 101 of these in 2017. From 2018, orange tags have also been used. The area covered includes the North Norfolk coast, the Norfolk Broads, and RSPB Lakenham Fen in Suffolk.

The survey is already showing some interesting findings:

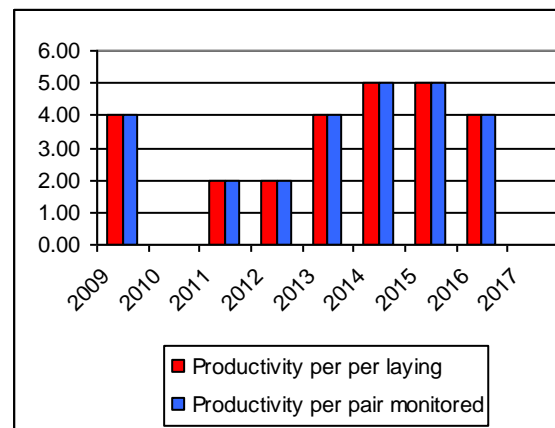
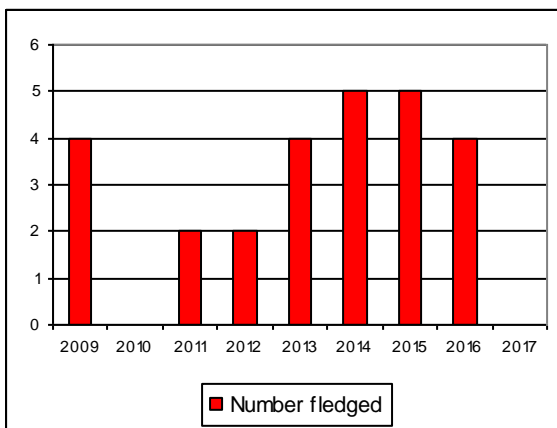
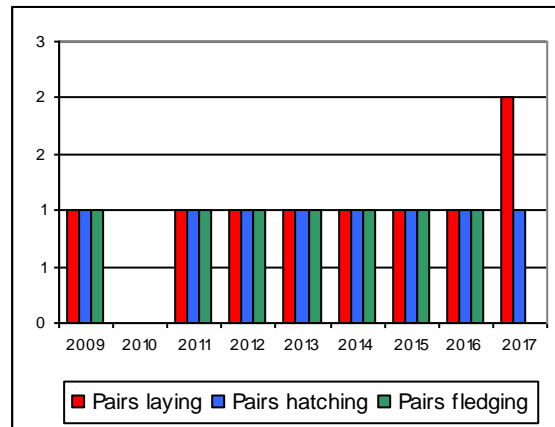
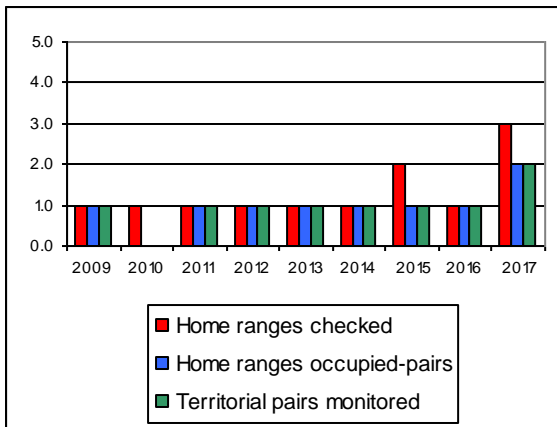
Young birds are dispersing randomly, some staying local and others travelling to 7 different European countries, as well as all over the UK.

Very few of the tagged birds are breeding, much lower than the 20% expected. The few birds which are breeding tend to choose the same habitat that they themselves were bred in, e.g. oil seed rape, reedbeds, but they are not necessarily breeding near to their own natal area.

Birds tagged in 2016 have been recorded in Holland and Norway, a 2nd and 1st respectively for those countries. Tagged birds are now being reported as breeding themselves, including one of the first birds ever tagged in the scheme, a female at Sculthorpe Moor in 2011, reported in Portugal 2012 [a 1st for that country], and in Belgium in 2015 [a 3rd there]. She bred successfully in Lincolnshire in 2016, raising 3 young.

He would welcome sightings of any birds seen in the NERF region. Sightings should be forwarded to him at [phillittler10@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:phillittler10@yahoo.co.uk), or by mobile on 07748 556758. Please include the tag number, letter and number, time and date, location, including the grid reference if possible, age and sex in the report.

## Comparative data 2009-2017



## Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*



### UK population estimate

The recent national survey, with contributions from NERF member groups, estimated the breeding population the UK and Isle of Man to be 575 territorial pairs with the majority in Scotland, 35 in Wales, 46 in Northern Ireland, 30 in the Isle of Man and a mere 4 in England. (Wotton, Simon *et al.* The Status of the Hen Harrier in the UK and Isle of Man in 2016. *Bird Study*: 65, Issue 2, Aug 2018). Overall, there was a decline, not statistically significant, from the previous survey of 2010.

The 2016 survey took care to also accurately assess Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in northern England for which the Hen Harrier features as a citation species in the original designations. In the Forest of Bowland SPA, which has 13 pairs cited, there were no pairs found during the survey and in the North Pennine SPA, which has 11 pairs cited, there was one territorial pair.

### Conservation status

UK: **Red**

European: 3; Concern, most not in Europe, depleted

Global: Least concern

Listed as Vulnerable (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110: Sep 2017).

### National and regional threat assessment

This is the UK's most persecuted bird of prey. The principal reason for the vulnerable and near-threatened extinction of the English breeding population is widely considered to be illegal persecution around intensively managed driven grouse moors. Numbers are now so low and recruitment so poor that the English population teeters on the very brink of extinction every year.

The Defra Upland Stakeholder Group Hen Harrier Joint Recovery Emergency Action Plan was issued ahead of the 2016 breeding season but now after two full seasons there is little to suggest a significant positive impact nor a sea change to those with intolerant attitudes. Plans

by Defra to prepare for brood management trials seem wholly misplaced and indeed objectionable with such a critically endangered species. The focus must be on enforced protection especially at nests and at roosts. One stark statistic is that by March 2017 of 16 young birds ‘satellite –tagged’ from nests in England and Scotland in 2016 a total of 10 were either dead or missing.

Even within the supposed flagships of designated SPAs in the north of England the recent national survey showed a very serious shortfall and we await the Government’s response to this. SPAs should represent one important element of the English population and with evidence of continued persecution there is an ever-urgent need to support the recovery of this species of such high conservation concern. An update to the Hen Harrier Conservation Framework (original by Fielding *et al*, 2011, JNCC Report 441) is still patiently awaited to guide and inform effective conservation measures.

Natural England have released six-figure grid references for the last known locations (‘fixes’) of most of the 59 birds they have tagged in the nest during 2010-17. The number labelled as “missing, fate unknown” was 47 (80%) which must be a huge cause for concern. Crucially the data shows some abnormal clusters of missing birds in areas dominated by managed driven grouse moors and which have also produced marked evidence of persecution of other species such as Red Kite and Goshawk. These areas include Bowland AONB, Yorkshire Dales National Park and Nidderdale AONB.

### NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSBG	20+	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
CRSBG	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
ChRSBG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
DUBSBG	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
MRBG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
NRBG	15	5	3	0	5	5	4	3	10	2.00	2.00
NYMUBSBG	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
PDRMBG	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
SPRSBG	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
YDRSBG	6	2	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>1.43</b>



## Group Reports

### **Bowland Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage throughout the year.

Disappointingly, 2017 was the second successive year that Hen Harriers did not breed in the species' previous stronghold of the Forest of Bowland. Very few individual Hen Harriers were seen over the spring and summer but a single immature male held territory in one valley from 11th April until 20th May. It displayed and built cock's nests but did not succeed in attracting a mate. There were intermittent sightings of other birds including 2 ringtails that joined the territory-holding male on the 7th May but they were not seen the next day or subsequently.

By way of contrast, Merlin had a record breeding season in parts of Bowland and Short-eared Owls were generally successful. Barn Owls and Kestrels that bred on the farmland below the moor in Bowland also had a very successful breeding season in 2017. This demonstrated that there was abundant food (both small mammals and small birds) and with ample, proven nesting habitat for Hen Harriers the very different fortunes are stark indeed. The magnitude of the impact of persecution associated with intensive driven grouse shooting that Hen Harriers face in Britain is once again highlighted.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; almost all areas receive annual monitoring though not known to occur as a breeding species.

There were no breeding attempts in Calderdale in 2017. Hen Harriers were reported on 49 occasions during 2016 and this increased substantially to 79 during 2017. Six of these were of individuals wandering throughout the study area from April to December. The bulk of the remaining sightings were made at the traditional winter roost in the north-west of the study area. Occupation of the roost commenced in the autumn with the arrival of a first-winter male and a satellite-tagged female. This satellite-tagged bird was present, almost daily, through until 4th March 2018. Unfortunately the tag was not functioning and the identity of the female could not be verified. At its height the roost contained a minimum of 7 individuals with perhaps as many as 10 on one day at the end of October. The majority of the birds were females; however they were often accompanied by a first winter male and a full adult grey male. The grey male was present sporadically from October through to December and is the first such record in 26 years of observations at a winter roost in Calderdale. With this large number of birds on site during autumn and winter it will be interesting to see whether or not birds remain to breed during the 2018 season.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

In some previous years early spring records of potential prospecting behaviour have been recorded on rare occasions so some casual monitoring is undertaken. There were no records during the breeding season. Odd birds were reported from the Dee Estuary during the winter periods.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; nearly all suitable habitat is monitored annually.

Birds appeared to be exceptionally scarce in upland areas in the first quarter with ‘zero’ returns from several watches at two historic roost sites. The RSPB Hen Harrier Hotline provided single day sighting reports made by the public of hunting ringtails from 3 upland moorland areas between late March and mid-April. In all cases, visits made by experienced observers the next day and in subsequent days each drew a blank. At best the original records would seem to represent birds moving through.

Despite widespread observer coverage of suitable upland areas there was no indication of any breeding attempt in the county.

In the final quarter one historic upland roost intermittently attracted 1-2 ringtails from late October to year-end. Separately, a juvenile male, named “Marc”, fledged from a nest in the current year, and fitted with a satellite-tracking collar, was noted moving into Durham in mid-November. It soon settled to hunt and roost in one upland area of the county through until the New Year. Unfortunately, the signal from the otherwise reliable transmitter suddenly failed in early February 2018. The last known ‘fix’ location was in Lunedale, near Middleton-in-Teesdale.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Passage birds recorded. Not known to occur as a breeding species.

There was a marked reduction in sightings this year. A ringtail flew north over Winter Hill March 15th, and one flew north-east over Wildersmoor nearby December 11th.

The group sponsored a satellite tag on a female (Dru) born in the NRG area, fitted by Stephen Murphy of Natural England and she is still alive at the time of writing (autumn 2018).



### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; several long term study areas.

With Hen Harriers having nested successfully in both 2015 and 2016 the return of birds in 2017 was eagerly anticipated and they did not disappoint. There was another strong showing with 5 nests being located with another pair settling nearby just outside the study area. The 5 nests went on to fledge 10 chicks (with another 2 from the 6th nest). Outcomes from the nests were mixed; one nest failed early having its eggs predated by a fox and at another the small chicks succumbed during a period of very wet weather.

The remaining 3 nests had clutches of 5, 4 and 4, brood sizes of 4, 4 and 3 and finally fledged a total of 10 young. One female chick was satellite-tagged by Natural England and another 2 males at the nest just outside the main area by the RSPB. The Northumberland Hen Harrier Protection Partnership should be congratulated for its considerable efforts in safeguarding these nests.

Elsewhere in Northumberland, an adult male frequented 2 previously used breeding areas and at one an adult female was observed but despite extensive searches no evidence of nesting was ever found.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage of suitable habitat.

Notably few sightings were reported during 2017. A female was present at Great Hogarth Moor on 9th April and an adult male at Goathland Moor on 28th April where a "possible" female was reported on 3rd May. A female was photographed reacting with some aggression to a female Marsh Harrier on Egton High Moor on 23rd September. Birds were reported on just 2 dates from the normally reliable Sleddale site in the final quarter, an adult male and first-winter bird on 4th December and a female on the 5th.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage of the study area.

PDRMG responded to all sightings reported to either the RSPB Hen Harrier Hotline or directly to the group. Despite reports of male and female birds, no evidence of pairing up or breeding behaviour was recorded.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage of the study area.

Effort in 2017 was directed again in responding to all sightings of Hen Harriers in and around the group's study area. No sightings were reported during the breeding season from the study areas on the Derbyshire, Staffordshire or South Yorkshire moorlands. Sporadic sightings of single birds were recorded on the Eastern Moors up to the end of March. A ringtail was seen in late September and a single grey male in October was in the same general area.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable / good coverage of representative study areas.

There were no breeding records in the Yorkshire area, but in the recently-extended Yorkshire Dales National Park area, in South Lakeland, a polygamous adult was paired to an adult and immature female. The behaviour of the adult female was indicative of incubation but failed early. The immature female was incubating but the nest failed during the egg stage. Both attempts were thought to have failed due to natural causes, most likely predation.

## **NERF regional summary**

In summary, 10 young were fledged from 3 successful nests out of 5 in Northumberland and two nests each failed at an early stage at the south Lakeland site. The Northumberland area continues as beacon of hope on land not managed for grouse shooting and its success over the last 3 years is testament to the efforts of all involved in the Northumberland Hen Harrier

Protection Partnership. Thanks are due to the Yorkshire Dales NPA for its work in protecting the 2 nests in south Lakeland.

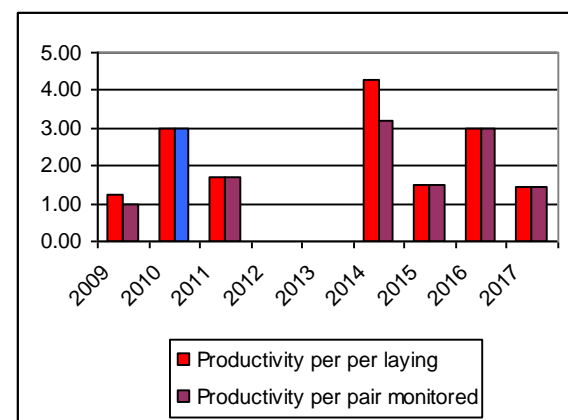
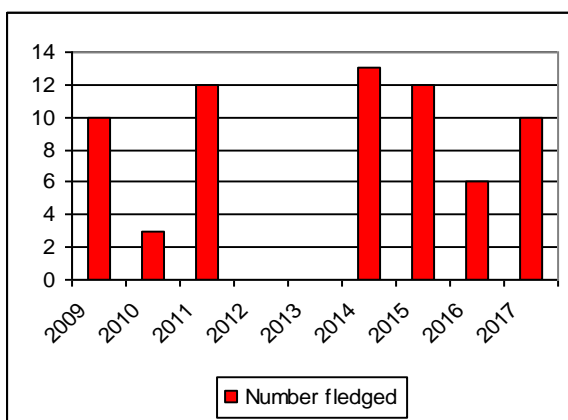
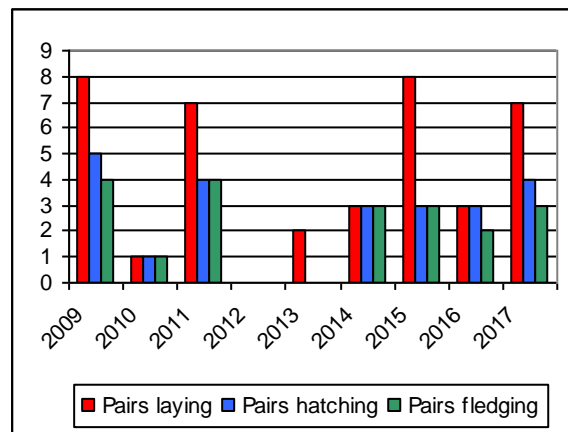
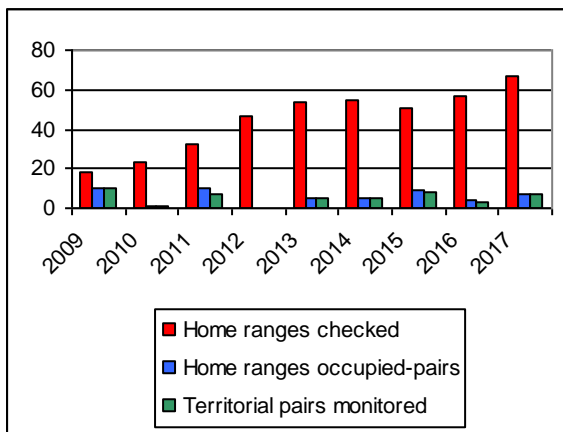
Elsewhere several groups including Durham, North York Moors and Peak & South Peak Districts but, most especially, Bowland, reported low numbers of birds during the spring and summer of 2017. Had Bowland supported more female Hen Harriers in spring then the story of the Pallid Harrier may well have been very different! The strong showing of birds at the autumn and winter roost in Calderdale seems noteworthy.

Evidence of persecution across our region continues to build with the sudden loss of “Marc’s” signal in County Durham in early February 2018.

The NERF website includes under Publications / Public Statements our assessment of the Defra Upland Stakeholders Hen Harrier Emergency Action Plan and other important topics relating to the current Hen Harrier debate.

NERF member groups continue to work with the RSPB Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project to monitor winter roosts, respond promptly with follow-up visits to reports from the public submitted into the RSPB’s Hen Harrier Hotline and, of course, to support monitoring and protection efforts at any breeding site.

### Comparative data 2009-2017



## Red Kite *Milvus milvus*



### UK and Ireland population estimate.

5000+ pairs. This figure is, in part, based on results from earlier years. The true figure is no doubt significantly greater than this, full monitoring no longer being undertaken in some areas - including Wales and The Chilterns. Information based on figures derived from UK and Ireland Red Kite Co-ordination Group and compiled by Doug Simpson MBE - YRK Co-ordinator.

The BTO BBS report for 2017 showed an increase of 7% 2016 to 2017, 406% 2006-16 and 18669% from 1995 to 2016.

### Conservation status

UK: **Green** - Population increasing.

Global/European and EU regional assessments: **Red** - Near threatened; undergoing a moderately rapid population decline in the three core states Germany, Spain and France due mainly to poisoning by pesticides, persecution and changes in land use.

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

### National and regional threat assessment

By far the biggest threat to Red Kites continues to come from illegal poisoning. Whilst they may not be the intended target, they are scavengers and will consume poisoned baits placed out illegally to kill other species. There have been at least 27 Yorkshire-related Red Kite illegal poisonings recorded since 2000, 23 of which have occurred in North Yorkshire. According to RSPB figures, this area has the unenviable record of being the worst in the UK for offences involving birds of prey. Shooting of kites continues, one having been confirmed in North Yorkshire in 2017. No doubt there were many others which were not reported. They are also susceptible to poisoning from second-generation rodenticides introduced to control rats which have become resistant to first-generation substances such as Warfarin. There is strong evidence that guidelines for the proper use of these poisons are not being followed and that, in consequence, they are getting into the food chain of scavenging species. There have been 13 recorded Yorkshire deaths from this cause since 2007.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
DUBSG	45	25	9	3	15	14	14	14	21	1.50	1.40
NRG (N'land)	3	2	NC	NC	2	2	2	2	3	1.50	1.50
NRG (Cumbria)	3	1	NC	NC	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1.53</b>	<b>1.44</b>

## Group reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

Kites are seen every year in the hills, and it is only persecution that is preventing them from breeding in Bowland, as there is extensive suitable habitat.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

There were 22 sightings of Red Kite across the study area in 2017. This represents an increase of 50% from 2016. Encouragingly these sightings were made in every month, except April, and birds were seen from our eastern border to the Pennines in the west. A pair of birds was reported over woodland between Hebden Bridge and Todmorden; however extensive observations failed to substantiate the report. Nonetheless, it can only be a matter of time before they breed in Calderdale.

### Cheshire Raptor Study Group.

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

No comprehensive monitoring, records seem to emanate from single birds passing through the county.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage: all or most sites receive annual coverage.

We are once again grateful to Friends of Red Kite (FoRK) for this summary.

Another disappointing year. This species continued to flat-line as far as breeding pairs/success is concerned. All successful sites were within the core area in the Derwent Valley or very close areas of North Durham. No indication of expansion into new areas. Red Kites were re-introduced in Gateshead BC in 2004 and first bred in 2006.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Pairs fledging young</b>	11	12	12	14	9+	20	13	8+	12
<b>Number fledged young</b>	17	24	24	23	18+	35	26	13+	21

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

1-2 sightings were reported to [www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com) in February, March, June, August, October and December, with 4 in May. RSPB Dovestones reported occasional sightings in the breeding season, but no evidence of breeding.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least 2 monitoring studies or large representative study area.

*Northumberland:* early indications confirmed 2 pairs showing territorial behaviour close to the original release site of the Derwent Valley, Tyne & Wear. These 2 pairs went on to fledge 3 young between them. The population continues to face difficulties in expanding beyond the original core area. Thanks to the Friends of Red Kites (FoRK) for this information.

*Cumbria:* 3 sites were checked and one nest was found, fledging 2 young.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

Still no evidence of possible nesting activity received from anywhere in the study area.

Although apparent "pairs" of birds were recorded occasionally there was never any display behaviour observed. The occurrence of single birds across the NYMs is now so frequent and commonplace that even some non-birding members of the public are beginning to regard sightings as nothing particularly remarkable. A nesting attempt must surely be on the cards in the not too distant future.

## Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

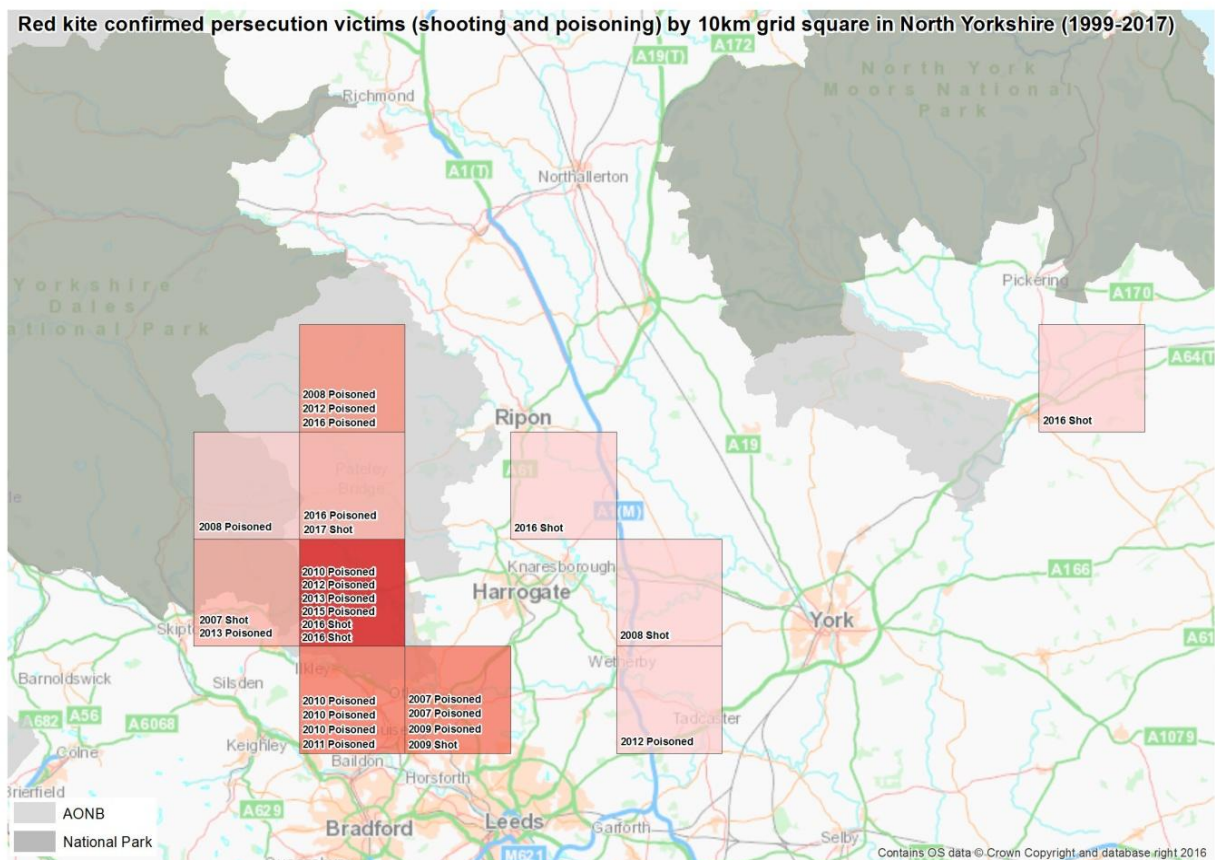
As in previous years sightings continue to rise annually.

## South Peak Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

Sightings of Red Kites in the study area continue, and future breeding remains a distinct possibility within Derbyshire and the Peak District, an area which has plenty of suitable habitat. The Derbyshire Bird Report for 2016 noted that the distribution of records in 1km squares throughout the county showed no obvious habitat or geographical preference, with birds being seen fairly evenly around the county. As in previous years there were a number of sightings of single birds throughout the year, but no breeding behaviour was recorded. A pristine adult was seen in the Brailsford / Kirk Langley area on several dates in late May, whilst in the Beeley Moor / Stone Edge area a moulting adult drifted W in late July, and an adult and a pristine juvenile flew W in early August; possibly the same juvenile was seen again near the same location five days later drifting west.



## Other data

### Yorkshire

The steady flow of reports of Red Kite sightings to the Yorkshire Red Kites website shows that they are continuing to explore new areas – both urban and rural. However, there is a



relative dearth of sightings from south of Leeds. In fact, putting to one side the East Yorkshire satellite population, the most southerly confirmed Yorkshire nest site is some 12km due east of Leeds City Centre and to the north of the A1(M)! However, there are indications that kites are spreading slowly northwards from the well-established Midlands population and it is possible that the large areas of potentially suitable habitat in the south of the county will soon be colonised from this source.

Breeding monitoring continued in 2017. It had not been possible to undertake a full survey in 2016, so 2 sets of figures are shown below. **Table 1** shows the confirmed figures for 2017, (bold type), and (in brackets) those figures for areas which had been surveyed in 2016.

**Table 2** shows the overall monitoring findings for 2017, including the previously excluded area.

**Table 1.**

<b>AREA</b>	<b>TERR. PAIRS</b>	<b>PAIRS BRED</b>	<b>PAIRS SUCC.</b>	<b>YOUNG</b>
West Yorkshire	<b>36</b> (36)	<b>36</b> (35)	<b>31</b> (29)	<b>57</b> (52)
North Yorkshire	<b>49</b> (41)	<b>47</b> (40)	<b>42</b> (36)	<b>79</b> (66)
East Yorkshire	<b>8</b> (7)	<b>8</b> (7)	<b>8</b> (7)	<b>13</b> (13)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>93</b> (84)	<b>91</b> (82)	<b>81</b> (72)	<b>149</b> (131)
Average young raised per successful pair: <b>1.84</b> (1.82)				

**Table 2.**

<b>Overall totals</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>194</b>
Average young per successful pair: <b>1.76</b>				

A total of 27 new nest sites were discovered, although several of these may have involved pairs which had decided on a change of location. Some of the new pairs were on estates well away from existing known sites, thus confirming that they are travelling further afield in their search for suitable, unoccupied, habitat and significantly extending the population range in the process. This was the primary objective of the release project and it is encouraging to see it being achieved.

Although unlikely to suffer the fate of species which have ingested plastic, kites are by no means immune to the consequences of this substance being widely discarded in the countryside. They incorporate it into their nests, sometimes significantly affecting the drainage of rainwater or snow which falls on them. Their weight can become too much for the branches supporting them and they fall to the ground – sometimes with dire consequences for the young which they contain. This happened to 3 long-established nests in 2017 whilst in a 4th case, the young were found dead in a pool of water in the nest.

The illegal killing of Red Kites, whether by poisoning or shooting, has been a regular and unacceptable feature of their presence since releases began in Yorkshire in 1999. Most of the

victims have died through feeding on poisoned baits placed in the open countryside – a practice which has been illegal for more than 100 years.

The shooting of yet another kite in the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), near Pateley Bridge in March 2017, led to unprecedented reactions on social media. The negative publicity and concerns about the level of wildlife crime in the area prompted immediate local action. Two local businessmen offered rewards for information leading to the arrest of whoever was responsible. The RSPB doubled the figure and a further contribution from Crimestoppers brought the total up to £4000. Unfortunately, this did not lead to the apprehension of the guilty party.

Coincidentally, wildlife persecution became an issue prompting public concern and comment in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the eastern boundary of which is adjacent to the Nidderdale AONB. This came to the fore as a result of a YDNPA public consultation, undertaken preparatory to drawing up its Management Plan for the period 2018 – 2023. The rows of *Leylandii* planted in the middle of a field on a large East Yorkshire estate continue to thrive. Their planting was an apparently vindictive act, undoubtedly intended to block the view of the local kite roost. It has spoiled things for the many people who visited the locality to see up to 80 or so kites gathering to roost. Disabled visitors had been able to sit in their wheelchairs to witness this spectacle. Unfortunately the apparently deliberate actions of the estate mean that this is no longer possible.

### **East Yorkshire Red Kites**

The following information has been submitted by an independent observer.

We continue to remain confident about the long-term success of the East Yorkshire Red Kite population. However, unfortunately once again there has been a slight decrease by just one in known successful breeding pairs in 2017. There are several accountable reasons for this, including the lack of access to monitor known nests where we have had to resort to observing from the public highway. Kites once again continue to move off the Wolds and we now have several pairs on the plain of York. Sightings continue to come in from the east of the county with minor sightings from the north. East Yorkshire is a massive area and we are confident there will have been other breeding pairs of which we are not aware. A maximum of 72 birds were recorded in December at the communal 2016/17 winter roost site indicating that there must be over 100 birds in the area.

### **NERF regional summary**

Reliable records are not available from all parts of the NERF region. Red Kites are also frequently recorded as passage birds in many study areas.

#### **WARNING:**

Some poisons are exceptionally toxic and can be absorbed directly through the skin. Raptor Workers finding a dead Red Kite, or any other species suspected to have been poisoned, should exercise extreme caution before handling a carcass. Butyl gloves offer some protection and may be used. (Note: The current Natural England practice is to wear two pairs.) Standard, thin, household gloves are not effective against many of the poisons found in dead Red Kites and should not be used. If the carcass is recovered it should be dropped into a bin liner. This bin liner should be placed inside a second with the butyl gloves dropped into the space between the 2 bags. The bags should then be securely tied. In every event it is advisable to wash or sterilise hands immediately after contact with a dead animal and in all cases before eating or smoking.

Yorkshire Red Kites have their own guidelines for dealing with casualties that may be found at:

[http://www.yorkshireredkites.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=13](http://www.yorkshireredkites.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=13)

It is essential that all suspected poisoning incidents are reported to the local Police and that an incident number is obtained. The cause of death will be determined by either the Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme [PBMS], telephone 01524 595830, email [pbms@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:pbms@ceh.ac.uk), or the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme [WIIS] telephone 0800 321600.

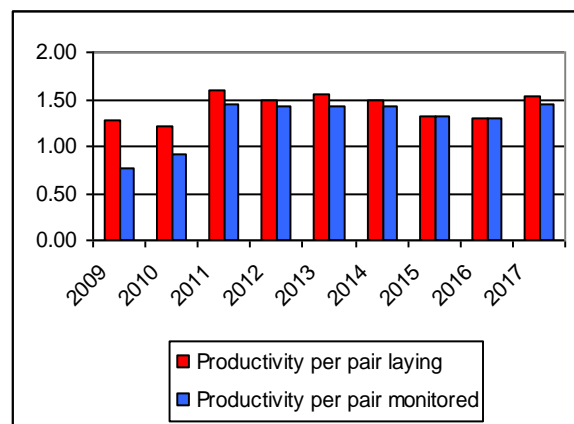
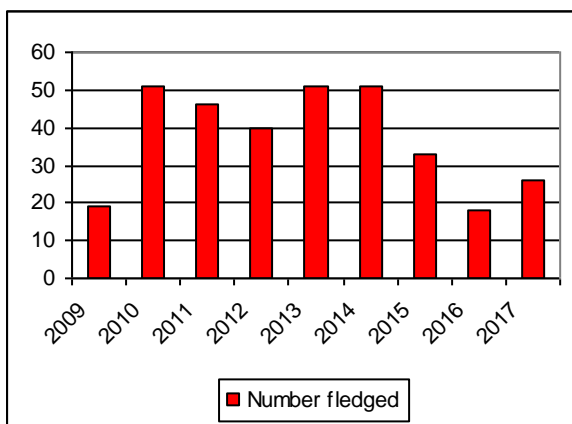
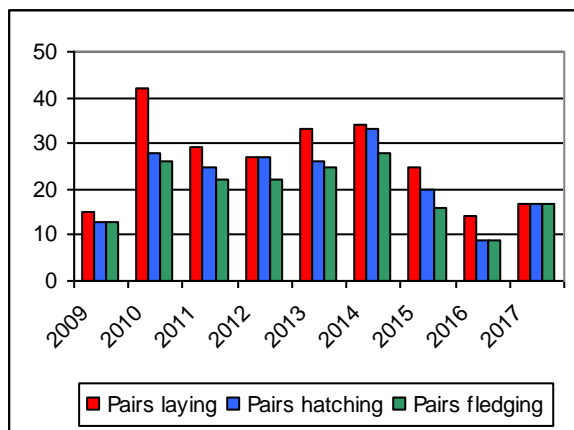
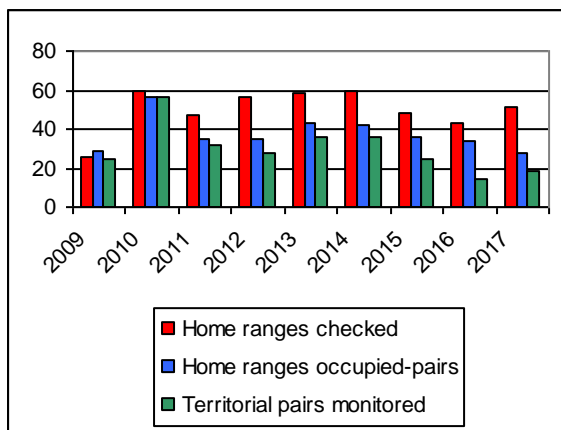
The information should also be passed on to the RSPB Headquarters, telephone 01767 680551; ask for the Investigations Team or email [crime@rspb.org.uk](mailto:crime@rspb.org.uk). To report persecution incidents in confidence call 0300 999 0101.

Sick or injured birds can be reported to the RSPCA, telephone 0300 1234 999.

All information and telephone numbers are correct as at September 2018.

For Local Police 'Dial 101' and ask to speak urgently to a Wildlife Crime Officer - please also ask for an incident number.

***NERF is grateful to Nigel Puckrin and Doug Simpson MBE for compiling the Red Kite summary.***



## Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*



### UK population estimate

In 2009 the population was estimated to be between 57000 and 79000 pairs (Musgrove *et al.* 2013. APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013), updated using BBS trend data. This remains the most up to date published estimate although all the trends since then indicate further growth has occurred. The latest BTO Breeding Bird Survey information for Buzzard nationally up to 2017 shows an increase from a baseline index of 100 in 1994 to around 350 in 2017.

The British breeding population represents about 11% of the European total (Birdlife International).

### Conservation status

UK            **Green**  
Europe:    Not of concern  
Globally:   Least concern

### National and regional threat assessment

The population nationally and within the NERF area continues to be generally healthy and growing. However, the overall trend masks more local situations where in some areas, particularly in and around moorland managed for grouse shooting, numbers remain stubbornly below the habitat carrying capacity. In contrast, areas outside keeper control continue to show the best population growth. This is such a strong correlation that direct persecution as a determinant of population is beyond dispute.

The RSPB's *Birdcrime* report for 2016 confirms that Buzzards continue to be shot and the species' account from the Peak District contains evidence of such an incident from within the Forum's area.

Furthermore, poisoning continues as a serious threat. The *Birdcrime* report notes a poisoning blackhole in Derbyshire, where over two years 6 Buzzards were found poisoned by the

banned pesticide alphachloralose. Despite police enquiries no culprits have been identified to date.

Such incidents undoubtedly represent a fraction of the true level of persecution given the difficulty of finding bodies in remote and often well-vegetated areas.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	7	7	NC	NC	7	7	7	7	NC	NC	NC
ChRSG	28	26	6	1	7	7	7	7	12	1.7	1.7
DUBSG	35	35	NC	NC	8	8	8	8	10	1.25	1.25
MRG	17	14	NC	NC	14	14	12	12	14	1.00	1.00
NRG	143	141	0	12	79	74	74	74	96	1.30	1.22
NYMUBSG	4	4	0	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
PDRMG	13	13	NC	NC	13	13	6	6	14	1.08	1.08
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>1.19</b>	<b>1.14</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage: casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Many Buzzards breed in the farmland areas but some pairs which attempt to breed in the uplands suffer persecution by gamekeepers associated with driven grouse shooting.

Individuals with wings showing evidence of shot damage are regularly noted.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Due to the lack of resources the monitoring of the Common Buzzard population throughout Calderdale is largely carried out on a casual basis. In line with other Raptor Study Groups, Calderdale is experiencing a large increase in the number of sightings throughout the year. During 2016 some 206 sightings were recorded and in 2017 there were 323, an increase of 24.23%. Whilst the known number of pairs breeding is only 7, taking into account the lack of

monitoring and the number and distribution of casual sightings during the breeding season it is reasonable to assume that additional pairs did breed successfully. It is clear therefore that further work needs to be undertaken in future years to improve our knowledge of the breeding status of this species in the study area.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

The county bird club received over 820 reports of Common Buzzards from across the whole county area in 2017, an increase of 49 % from the previous year. However, within the upland areas numbers continue to be relatively low with only 35 sites producing regular reports. This reflects both the general eastwards shift in the overall population away from the uplands and the difficulty of monitoring this quite secretive breeder. Eight monitored nests produced an average of 1.25 young, poor compared to the productivity level of 2 achieved in 2016. The largest group recorded occurred in winter in late January near Wolsingham in mid-Weardale, over farmland between managed moors and prior to pair dispersal.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Fourteen pairs had confirmed breeding and 12 of these produced 14 young. At the 2 other sites the outcome was unknown. A 15th site failed at the egg stage and was monitored by PDRMG so is not included in the figures in the table. Sightings at a further 3 sites suggested successful breeding but the data were insufficient to confirm the outcomes. David Steel once again checked 9 nests on the mosslands.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part of upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least two monitoring studies or large representative study area.

Data was received from four study areas in 2017, a welcome increase:–

*Border Forest, Kielder:* 50 nests were found (cf. 50 in 2016) of which 37 were successful (22 in 2016), fledging an excellent 57 young (up from 28 in 2016). This was the result of a very good vole year locally, the principal prey species. One nest fledged a brood of 4, a record for this study area.

*South Cheviots/MOD Otterburn:* 60 occupied home ranges were found (cf. 55 in 2016). 35 nests were found and of these 30 fledged 30 young.

*North Cheviots:* 25 home ranges were occupied (32 in 2016) but no outcomes were recorded.

*Slaley Forest:* 7 home ranges were occupied and 7 nests were found, 4 of which fledged 9 young including a brood of 5 chicks.

*Grizedale Forest, Cumbria:* not reflected in the data table but studied by the NRG. This new outlying study area held a monitored 8 pairs from 10 occupied ranges. Eight pairs laid and went on to fledge 7 young at 0.87 per pair.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland part lowland.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

This is not a targeted study species of the Group. Reports were received from most parts of the North York Moors of successful fledging. However, no nests received incidental monitoring this season, although 4 home ranges were occupied by pairs.

The species appears to be enjoying the greatest breeding success and range expansion within the interior wooded dales and farmland, and peripheral margins of the national park across to the east coast. There is little tolerance or indulgence of these birds near or adjacent to grouse moors, but evidence that they still manage to breed successfully in forests bordering them was indicated by a party of 8, possibly of two families, drifting over one grouse moor adjacent to Cropton Forest late season. Outside the park the species is also thriving in Cleveland to the north-west and southwards over the Vale of Pickering.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Other commitments resulted in lower effort than usual expended on this species in the Group's study area. Failures continue to be common in areas adjacent to grouse moors. An injured bird was found by a member of the public at Stainborough. An x-ray revealed a broken wing and shotgun pellets lodged in the wing [see <https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/buzzard-shot-in-barnsley-sparks-investigation/>.] There was a further incident nearby which was also reported to the police: a nest failed when all the young died due to starvation, after the apparent loss of the adult birds. Tyre tracks, cigarette butts and a fresh shotgun cartridge were discovered under the nest tree.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

The Group no longer systematically monitors the species as it is so widespread. Continued lack of successful breeding adjacent to the Upper Derwentdale grouse moors points towards persecution as the likely cause.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

The species remains widespread in the Dales but there is no estimate of the breeding population.

## **NERF regional summary**

Within the NERF study area the Common Buzzard continues to recover after decades of persecution. However, the relatively limited success of breeding Buzzards in many upland areas of northern England is still evident with noticeably fewer post-breeding family groups of birds noted than is to be expected. This contrasts sharply with the very evident healthy growth experienced in the lowland areas, which, significantly, are usually un-keepered. The respective county bird clubs, whose recording areas extend well beyond the upland areas covered by most of the NERF member groups, continue to confirm this trend through the annually increasing reported sightings they receive.

Many RSGs again noted a clear pattern of failures in and around grouse moors. Furthermore, the species is susceptible to casual disturbance around the nest, which undoubtedly occurs, and which prevents many birds from settling down to breed but is virtually impossible to prove.

The 230 home ranges occupied across the NERF area mirrored the comparable 2016 figure exactly, despite the lack of resources that required several RSGs to prioritise other species for study. The total number of fledged young recorded was a record high of 146, up from 99 in

2016, principally because of a large increase noted in Northumberland linked to a very good vole year. However, average productivity per laying pair across the whole area was down from 1.57 in 2016 to 1.18 this year, but young fledged per monitored territorial pair increased from 0.72 to 1.14.

## Barn Owl *Tyto alba*



### UK population estimate

The Bird Atlas 2007-11 had suggested an expansion of 67% since the 1988-91 Atlas, due to nestbox schemes, mild winters and agro-environment schemes. Musgrove *et al.* (APEP 3. *British Birds* 106: February 2013) give a figure of 4000 (3000-5000) based on the now rather old survey date of 1995-1997. The work done by the many Barn Owl groups around the country to increase the number of boxes, especially at higher altitudes where they were not thought to breed in any numbers, may have resulted in a considerably higher population today.

The Barn Owl Trust commented:- overall 2017 was a good year for Barn Owls but with some notable exceptions. Across most of England and into mid-Wales Barn Owls had a generally good to very good year. However, Barn Owls had a relatively poor year in West Galloway, West Cornwall, and the Isle of Wight. Those on Jersey experienced a very poor year and in Northern Ireland Barn Owls are still very scarce.

### Conservation status

UK: **Green**  
European: 3: Concern, most not in Europe; declining  
Global: Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Barn Owls cannot be released into the wild without a licence from DEFRA.



## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSG	34	29	0	0	29	29	28	28	124	4.28	4.28
CaRSG	4	3	2	0	3	3	3	3	7	2.33	2.33
ChRSG	1785	196	14	4	200	200	196	196	489	2.45	2.45
MRG	113	47	10	4	42	42	41	41	120	2.86	2.86
NRG	250	134	3	2	132	130	129	128	470	3.62	3.56
NYMUBSG	56	24	4	0	24	24	24	24	72	3.00	3.00
PDRSG	13	3	0	0	3	2	2	2	8	4.00	2.66
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2255</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>1290</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>2.98</b>

## National and regional threat assessment

The usual ever-present threats of habitat destruction, barn conversions and reductions in agri-environmental schemes, together with deaths due to traffic collisions and other accidents in the human environment, are somewhat balanced by an increasing interest in helping this species, due to its photogenic appeal. Barn Owl came 3rd in a national vote for Britain's most popular bird in a vote in 2015, despite the fact that many people who voted had probably never seen one. The Barn Owl Trust also suggests that improvements in box design should be incorporated into replacements or new boxes, to increase owlet survival – chicks which drop onto the floor from boxes often die if they are too young to return.

## Group reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

2017 was a much better year for this species, with numbers of breeding pairs and fledged chicks much increased compared to 2016: 29 pairs (compared to 7 in 2016) fledged 124 chicks (compared to 15 in 2016). Surveys in one valley in Bowland suggested that the vole population was recovering from its crash in 2015.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Breeding Barn Owls remain very rare in Calderdale. However, encouragingly, the number of known successful sites increased from one in 2016 to 3 in 2017. In addition to the 3 successful breeding attempts recorded by members of the group, a landowner also reported that another pair was present during the breeding season and apparently raised young. The number of fledglings is not known and therefore not included in the table.

A single bird was regularly seen catching prey in the Hebden Bridge area during the summer months, and following a successful hunt, the bird returned to the same barn with prey on each occasion. A subsequent examination of the barn, which is also occupied by a breeding Kestrel, revealed a large quantity of owl pellets but no evidence of breeding. A nest box was installed at the end of the season.

In the east of the study area a single Barn Owl, wearing jesses, was seen hunting over the same farm fields almost daily by members of the public. The owl was eventually located roosting in a hay barn on the farm and a local falconer made several attempt to lure it back into captivity with a view to returning it to the owner. However it soon became clear that the bird was self-sufficient and refused to respond to the lure. Whilst there was no evidence of breeding, a nest box was subsequently installed in the barn in autumn.

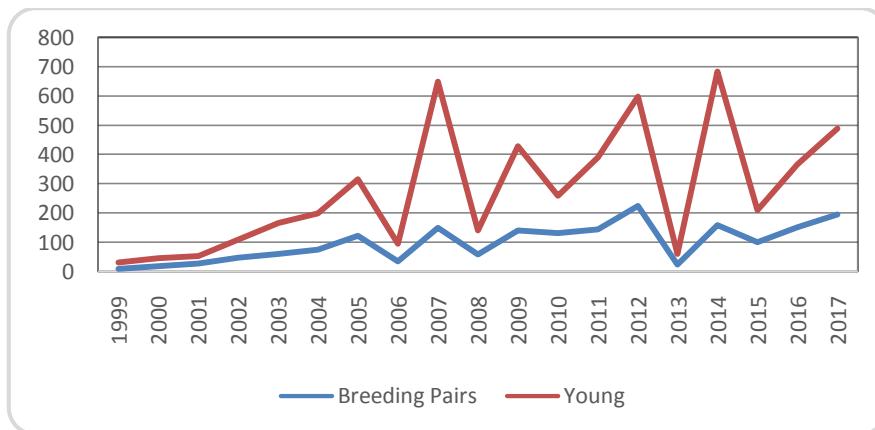
### Cheshire Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

A good year for Barn Owls, with the second highest number of breeding pairs but the productivity remained below the average and was below the figure quoted by Shawyer for sustainability. However, the Cheshire Barn owl population does in fact seem to be sustainable!

**YOUNG AND PAIRS VS YEAR**



The above graph shows the population growth in pairs of owls and the young output per year from monitoring over 20 years commencing in 1997. The graph shows a steady increase in population through fluctuating prey cycles.

The adult recoveries still comprise around 50% unringed birds which is indicative of a substantial un-tapped number of birds in the population. It has been suggested that some of these are birds moving in from outside the area. This may be the case, but as they don't move very far, most are probably from Cheshire.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

The general impression was that the Barn Owl breeding population had fallen since the strong showing of 2016. 1-2 birds were seen in autumn around moorland fringes.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas; whole county.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

One pair was double-brooded due to supplementary feeding throughout the year, and another pair laid eggs but failed, probably due to one of the pair being killed on a road nearby. Ten boxes were used for the first time and 5 more chicks died before fledging (therefore 123 chicks in total). Five further sites probably had breeding (one definitely) but due to H&S reasons or unco-operative owners, could not be checked. The best season ever, and helped by the new boxes erected over the last couple of years by Jamie Dunning and Chris Sutton.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

As with the other species of owl and Common Buzzard, 2017 was a record year in Northumberland. With the vole population having recovered from the crash in the uplands, both the lowlands and the high ground had an extremely successful nesting season.

With data recovered from 7 study areas covering both high and low ground, it was very apparent that 2017 was going to be a great year.

130 home ranges were found of which 126 pairs laid clutches of eggs, 125 pairs hatched eggs fledging 462 chicks - a fantastic result.

It was noted that while the Border Forest Kielder, north Cheviots, and the low ground study areas had all recovered well, in the south the Cheviots/MOD Otterburn study had only a fifth of the available nesting territories occupied, so the Barn Owl population has still some more gains to make.

Thanks go to Phil Hanmer for the low ground records.

### ***Holy Island***

For the first time since breeding resumed on the island in 2008 after a gap of over half a century, 4 pairs bred. One pair fledged 4 young, another pair fledged 3 young and a 3rd pair fledged a single chick. The 4th pair raised one chick to near fledging when it died from unknown causes.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least two monitoring studies or large representative study area.

North York Moors Upland Bird Study Group	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
Scheme A	37	19	3	0	19	19	19	19	53	2.79	2.79
Scheme B	19	5	1	0	5	5	5	5	19*	3.80	3.80

\*Exact number fledged was not known

**Scheme A:** Is a South Cleveland Ringing Group nest box scheme. The species continues to thrive and increase its range with few casualties caused by winter conditions. New pairs were reported from areas close to existing established birds tending to suggest a degree of territory in-filling might be occurring. The majority of pairs produced small clutches and just the one or 2 chicks: 38 were ringed. Rodent larders were seldom found in boxes - an indication perhaps of low prey numbers.

**Scheme B:** Run by G Myers on the western perimeter of the NYMs. This scheme is based principally on the Tees Plain. Results from these boxes not included in the table above were 19 checked, 17 occupied by pairs, of which 16 produced 77 young, an average of 4.81 chicks per pair. This species certainly seems to find the Tees Plain farmland habitat better suited to its needs than that of the NYMs.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor; casual monitoring of a few pairs

Pairs of Barn Owls were present at 3 sites in 2017, but only 2 pairs were recorded breeding. With the support of Derbyshire Ornithological Society, the group continues to construct and erect Barn Owl nest boxes for use within the study area.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

In the SPRSG recording area, 3 broods of Barn Owls were raised on the Chatsworth Estate: at least 7 young fledged, but none was ringed.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

Yorkshire Dales

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

There were widespread reports of Barn Owls from across the Dales which would suggest that the species is widely distributed across the National Park.

### NERF regional summary

Overall, 2017 was a good year in terms of Barn Owl productivity across the NERF recording range.

The birds on lowland farmland areas seem to be more successful than the pairs at higher altitudes; this may be linked to weather and temperature factors influencing timing of breeding rather than prey and nest site availability.

The last few years have seen the Barn Owl population building in the NERF range. If ecological cycles follow the normal timelines a prey crash is due, and the recovery from such an event will be a true measure of the resilience of the Barn Owls in the region.

### Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*



### UK population estimate

In 2005 the population was estimated at 50000 pairs (Musgrove *et al.* 2013. APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013). The Bird Atlas 2007-11 suggests a shallow decline of 17% 1967-2010 but the reasons for this are unknown. The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey 2017 suggested a 1% increase 2016-17, a 15% decline 2006-16 and a 26% decline 1995-2016, with the caveat that nocturnal species are covered poorly by the scheme; for example the 2014 BBS found a 71% increase 2013-14!

### Conservation status

UK:	Amber
European:	Not of concern
Global:	Least concern

## National and regional threat assessment

The UK breeding population of Tawny Owls has fallen by about a third over the last 25 years or so. This has resulted in the species being moved from Green to Amber in the list of Birds of Conservation Concern published in December 2015.

Threats to the well-being of these birds these days stem principally from potential harmful effects of present generation rodenticides through consumption of poisoned prey, and the usual targeted persecution by gamekeepers of individuals visiting Pheasant co-ops. Goshawks are likely to become an ever more significant predator of owl fledglings in coniferous forests and the increasing population of Buzzards may also make life hazardous for young owls raised in the species' preferred deciduous woodland habitat. Tawny Owls survive testing winter conditions well probably through their ability to switch to feathered prey when small rodents are not accessible, for example by the plundering of thrush or finch roosts.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	21	6	0	0	6	6	5	5	9	1.80	1.80
MRG	51	51	NC	NC	51	51	51	51	99	1.94	1.94
NRG	363	164	0	11	153	144	142	140	302	2.10	1.97
NYMUBSG	36	13	0	0	13	13	12	12	22	1.69	1.69
PDRMG	7	6	NC	0	3	3	3	3	6	2.00	2.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>2.02</b>	<b>1.94</b>

## Group Reports

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

During 2017 there were 62 records submitted from 16 separate locations. The Group monitors a nest box scheme and 6 boxes were found to contain breeding pairs, however one pair abandoned 2 eggs after they failed to hatch. In another box 4 chicks hatched but only 3

fledged and it is presumed that the 4th chick was eaten by either one of the adults or by one of its siblings. Once again several of the boxes were occupied by Stock Doves.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

**Level of monitoring:** Whole County.

There is no known comprehensive monitoring of this species across the county. Records mainly emanate from farmland and woodland areas. However, it is a very under-recorded bird. A total of 20 were ringed in 2017.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

There are no monitoring studies of Tawny Owl in the county but it undoubtedly remains the commonest of our owls with a breeding presence reaching upland conifer blocks.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

As with Barn Owl, an excellent season due to the dry spring weather. Fifty-one sites produced 99 young, an average of 1.94 per nest. One brood of 4 was ringed and there were 12 broods of 3 – exceptional in a species where 1 or 2 chicks is the norm.

Peter and Norma Johnson recorded their best season ever with 32 boxes producing 57 chicks, an average of 1.78. At Dovestones RSPB reserve, 3 chicks fell out of a Magpie nest and were replaced in a hanging basket nearby by the mountain rescue team.

Breeding probably took place at 31 other sites not included in the table above.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least 2 monitoring studies or large representative study area.

*Cumbria Study:* There is only one study area in Cumbria now, that being in Grizedale Forest. The vole population there, as in Northumberland, recovered well from the abysmal 2016 level, thus the species enjoyed an appreciable improvement in breeding fortunes with 37 home ranges occupied producing 65 fledglings compared to 2016, when just 8 pairs failed to fledge a single chick.

*Northumberland Study:* A complete reversal of fortunes for this species also compared to the dire season of 2016, with the vole population bouncing back enabling birds to enjoy a very successful year. Reports were received from 10 locations in the county including some lowland areas surveyed by Phil Hanmar. Of the 283 home ranges checked, 117 were occupied producing 237 fledglings – a significant improvement over the comparable 2016 figures of 38 occupied sites producing just 31 fledglings! The results from one area were not known for certain, but 15 young were thought to have survived giving an overall total of 252 fledglings for the season. Interestingly, 5 nests were found in natural sites, one in a tree cavity, one on the ground at the base of a Sitka Spruce, another on top of an epicormic growth and 2 in old Buzzard nests.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole National Park area

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least 2 monitoring studies or large representative study area.

The data above refer to nestbox schemes run by the South Cleveland Ringing Group, and G. Myers who operates principally to the west of the study area. Although the occupation rate of the SCRG boxes was again disappointingly low, at least all pairs bred successfully and most fledged more than one chick, (i.e. 2 pairs 3 chicks, 4 pairs 2 chicks, 3 pairs a single chick). G. Myers' boxes were also more productive than in 2016. Eleven boxes embraced by his scheme but located on the Tees Plain, thus not in the study area so not included in the table above were checked; 5 were occupied, all pairs successfully producing a total of 9 fledglings.

The table below gives the breeding performance from the SCRG scheme in 5 year bandwidths.

### **Tawny Owl Annual Production Data Large Nestbox Scheme (A)**

Year Band	No. of sites	Number occupied	% occ	No. successful	Young ringed	Avg per succ. nest	Avg all nests
1977-81	202	55	27.2	29	69	2.4	1.25
1982-86	174	46	26.4	34	72	2.1	1.57
1987-91	169	54	31.9	41	83	2.0	1.54
1992-96	150	33	22.0	29	51	1.8	1.55
1997-01	109	24	22.0	18	32	1.8	1.33
2002-06	128	38	29.7	28	50	1.8	1.32
2007-11	154	44	28.6	40	68	1.7	1.55
2012-16	145	33	22.9	22	39	1.77	1.18
2017	31	9	29.0	9	17	1.89	1.89

(2017 in isolation obviously cannot be compared directly to earlier data in the table.)

#### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study  
Monitoring of Tawny Owls was not given priority in 2017. Of 6 occupied sites only 3 were revisited, these were successful fledging a total of 6 young.



### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place

The species is not monitored on a regular basis by the SPRSG but remains a fairly common resident.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale RSG**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place

This bird is a common enough resident but no monitoring data are available for the season.

### **NERF regional summary**

Pleasingly, Tawny Owls appear to have enjoyed a generally successful season across most of the NERF reporting areas following a few years of indifferent breeding performance in some. The vole population during 2017 presumably was in its first recovery season of its usual 3-4 year cycle, which leads one to hope 2018 may see populations swell further contributing to another productive breeding season for these owls.

### **Little Owl *Athene noctua***



### **UK population estimate**

The current estimate is 5700 pairs (summer) as at 2009 (Musgrove *et al.* 2013. APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013). The 2017 BBS Report shows a 19% decline 2016-17, a 46% decline 2006-16 and a 58% decrease 1995-2016. Similarly in mainland Europe the decline of Little Owl has resulted in its listing as a Species of European Conservation Concern.

### **Conservation status**

UK: Not assessed (as introduced)  
European: 3: Concern, most not in Europe; declining  
Global: Least concern

## National and regional threat assessment

The CBC/BBS trend for Little Owl in the UK shows very wide variation, but a downturn in recent decades suggests that a rapid decline now lies behind the observed fluctuations. The UK's Little Owl population has declined by 65% in 25 years 1988 - 2013 (BTO BirdTrends). There is as yet little direct evidence to explain the losses in the UK but continental studies suggest poor survival rates for juveniles to be a primary driver linked to changes in farming practices and habitat.

The UK Little Owl Project, set up in June 2015 by conservation biologist Dr Emily Joáchim, with the assistance of Andy Rouse Wildlife Photography, aims to further our understanding of the Little Owl's ecology in the UK. They want to support, develop and promote new and existing UK Little Owl research. This includes projects which monitor Little Owl nests, record biometrics, habitat use, diet, vocalisations and juvenile survival rates. They have set up a UK Little Owl sightings project for more information at [www.littleowlproject.uk](http://www.littleowlproject.uk) and reports and geographic spatiality can be viewed on this site.

## NERF data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	29	4	NC	NC	4	4	4	4	7	1.75	1.75
ChRSG	7	7	NC	NC	7	7	7	7	14	2.00	2.00
MRG	32	10	NC	NC	6	6	4	4	6	1.0	1.0
NRG	7	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.0	1.0
NYMUBSG	5	5	NC	NC	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1.56</b>	<b>1.56</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

The Little Owl breeds at a traditional site which is monitored casually on passing. Success can be proved when the chicks can be seen all stood together on the roof of the old barn on warm sunny days.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

101 sighting records were received but these only mustered 4 pairs occupying sites in 29 checked ranges with little specific monitoring of outcomes available.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage, casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Casual monitoring resulted in 5 adults and 14 pulli ringed in 2017, from 7 broods. More dedicated survey work is planned in coming years.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

Little Owls are uncommon in the uplands but can be found breeding in field barns and walls up to 400m above sea level. In the lowland areas of the county populations remain quite strong in the east but appear to be reducing significantly in farming areas in central Durham. There is no structured monitoring.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Using records from group members and those submitted to [www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com) and from others, there were records from a total of 32 locations for this sedentary owl. However, there was confirmed breeding at only 6 of these sites, with one of these relating to a used nest (so number fledged unknown), and at 2 others it was only known that breeding had been successful.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

Results from the continuing nest study in south-east Northumberland were again poor with just one nest fledging 2 chicks. A further record was received from a sand quarry of a single bird in a known breeding area. To appreciate the situation of the species in Northumberland, records from the Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club have been examined which show Little Owls at 21 localities in 2016, the lowest recorded number since 1991.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

This species receives little targeted attention from the Merlin Group, so to a certain extent is a little bit of a mystery; it is probably more numerous and widely distributed breeding species than considered at present. Pairs probably bred at 3 coastal locations within the study area and at 2 moorland sites. However none of the pairs was monitored throughout the nesting

season. Further investigation of this species, and Long-eared Owl would be beneficial but are currently beyond the scope of the group.

### NERF regional summary

The Little Owl's preference for lowland, open arable habitat with old trees, mature hedgerows or farm out-buildings for nesting produces a bias away from its being seen and reported by those RSG field-workers whose activities focus them into upland terrain. Nevertheless, the species can be found in the NERF recording area at lower elevations though not at any great density.

For those sample areas studied the relatively low yield of occupied home ranges is noticeable compared to the number of traditional territories checked by members. Fledging rates remain only modest.

It should be noted that most groups do not concentrate specifically on monitoring of Little Owls and any recorded breeding success tends to develop from *ad hoc* observations that may then be followed up depending on other commitments of individual field workers.

### Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*



### UK population estimate

The latest population estimate is 1800-6000 pairs (Musgrove *et al.* 2013, APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013). It is certainly under-recorded, because of the wide range of habitats used. Where an intensive study is carried out, numbers found are always considerably higher than thought. The Bird Atlas 2007-11 found a decline of 19% since the 1968-72 atlas. The RBBP report for 2016 gave a figure of 124-216 breeding pairs. (Holling, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2016 *in press.*)

### Conservation status

UK: **Green.** Added to the RBBP monitoring list from 2010.  
European: Not of concern  
Global: Least concern

## National and local threat assessment

The main threat to Long-eared Owl appears to be competition for habitat with Tawny Owls and predation from larger raptors. Breeding attempts are affected by prey availability and in poor vole years large numbers of adults do not breed; those that do breed produce smaller clutches.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSR	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	4	4.00	2.00
CaRSG	8	8	NC	NC	5	5	5	5	15	3.00	3.00
MRG	14	14	NC	NC	14	14	12	12	20*	1.43*	1.43*
NRG	22	7	0	0	7	5	4	4	9	1.80	1.29
PDRMG	4	4	NC	0	3	3	1	1	4*	1.33*	1.33*
SPRSG	5	1	NC	NC	1	1	1	1	2*	2.00*	2.00*
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>0.75</b>

\* Understated calculation: does not take into account nests where young fledged but numbers were not known. See group text below for more details.

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage, casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Two breeding sites were located in 2017. At one of the sites 4 chicks fledged. One was found later in the winter dead by a road a few kilometres away from the breeding site. At the second site one of the adults was taken to a vet having been found injured by a road. The outcome of the breeding attempt at this site was unknown.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

A total of 34 records were received from 8 sites during 2017. Five of the sites successfully fledged 15 young. At the remaining 3 sites pairs were located at the start of the breeding season. However, due to lack of resources and commitment to other species, no further observations were made and the outcome at those sites is unknown.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

The upland study group does not monitor Long-eared Owl populations. More generally, reports from the Durham Bird Club suggest it remained a scarce winter visitor with few roosts found. It is thought that as a breeding bird it is undoubtedly under-recorded in the group's study area.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

A much better year than last, with a total of 14 sites producing a minimum of 20 young from 10 nests, where the number of fledged young was known. At 2 nests the number of young fledged was unknown but some fledged young were heard, and at two nests the eggs were predated. Bob Kenworthy again monitored breeding at a number of sites on the Rochdale/Oldham border, as did Gordon Yates.

Of the 14 sites, all except 2 were in the east of the county. During the breeding season, there was another sighting near the Wigan Flashes, but this was not followed up.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

Data was received from 3 areas in Northumberland.

With the vole population recovered after the extreme low in 2016, nesting birds were found in 2 areas:

The Kielder Study Area had a better year, with 6 home ranges occupied, of which 4 pairs laid eggs and 8 young fledged from 3 nests. One nest failed when the adult female was predated by a Goshawk, a repeat of 2016 at this site.

Away from the Kielder Study Area a pair fledged at least one chick.

No nesting was recorded on the Northumberland/Tyne & Wear border in 2017.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

For the 2nd year running no records at all were received. Without a dedicated survey being carried out, any population estimate for this species is simply going to reflect the opinion and conjecture of local fieldworkers. The perceived wisdom is that this species breeds across the study area in suitable habitat but at a low population density. Sadly, the Merlin Group does not have sufficient manpower resources to do anything positive about this existing vague situation.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

Three pairs of Long-eared Owl are known to have attempted to breed and reached the egg stage, however only one nest was followed up, this nest was successful fledging four young.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

2017 was a poor year for the species, with only one pair proved to have bred in the SPRSG area; at least two juveniles fledged, but there could have been 4 or 5 young in this nest.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

No formal monitoring of this species takes place. One pair was reported breeding in 2017.

## **NERF regional summary**

Although Long-eared Owls are notoriously difficult to monitor, there are several studies undertaken within the NERF region. Distribution is subject to under-recording owing to the discrete nature of the species and a lack of manpower.

Moorland fringe conifer plantations appear to be an important habitat for this species, a habitat that is being reduced significantly due to forestry work being undertaken in many of the study areas.

## **Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus***



### **UK population estimate**

The UK population of this inherently nomadic species is highly variable from year to year, tied as it is to the abundance of voles, the principal prey item, but perhaps also to late winter and early spring weather conditions. The latest UK population estimate falls within the broad range 620-2180 pairs (Musgrove *et al.* APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013) which, in part, reflects the challenges of accurately surveying birds in their mainly upland habitat. Overall, a long term decline in breeding pairs has been apparent (BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11) and this resulted in the Rare Breeding Birds Panel beginning to include the species in its reports from 2010. Nationally the level of reports of ‘possible’ or ‘confirmed’ breeding received by RBBP remains low – 20-181 pairs in 2016 (Holling, M. *et al.* Rare Breeding Birds in the UK in 2016 *in press*) with a strong element of under-recording inevitable from

what are often incidental records obtained as a by-product of monitoring other upland species.

### Conservation status

UK: **Amber**  
 European: 3: Concern, most not in Europe; depleted  
 Global: Least concern

Listed as ‘Endangered’ in the UK by Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017 (The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110: Sep 2017) with a reported 60% reduction in range.

### National and regional threat assessment

The challenges of surveying this species tend to make accurate assessment of local or more general populations quite problematic. Any underlying reasons which might explain apparent long term declines are difficult to discern. Even in good vole years sightings can be hard to come by and interpret. A study linking early spring vole densities and weather patterns to Short-eared Owl breeding success could be instructive for those willing to take up the challenge. Local incidents of persecution as reported in NERF’s 2015 Annual Review remain of considerable concern for this endangered emblem of the moors.

### NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSBG	15	8	0	0	8	8	8	8	10+	-	-
CaRSG	7	4	0	2	2	1	1	1	2	2.00	1.00
DUBSG	23	13	5	1	9	9	8	8	NC	-	-
NRG	14	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
NYMUBSG	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
PDRMG	11	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	4	4.00	2.00
SPRSG	6	5	0	0	5	1	1	1	2	2.00	0.40
YD&NRSG	5	3	0	0	3	2	2	2	NC	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20+</b>	<b>0.87*</b>	<b>0.67*</b>



\*Understated calculation: does not take into account nests where young fledged but numbers were not known.

## Group Reports

### **Bowland Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage over a large representative study area.

2017 was a significantly better year than 2016 for this species in Bowland. From no birds being seen at all during the breeding season in 2016, 8 pairs were found to have fledged chicks in 2017. It was not possible to find all nests before chicks had left the nests but brood sizes appeared high. Parent birds were seen feeding 6 chicks that had left one nest, and 4 at another.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

There were 36 records of Short-eared Owls received by the Group between mid-March and early November 2017. Whilst some birds were back on their breeding grounds by March the main influx arrived in early May, perhaps suggesting a late local increase in spring vole numbers though overall the vole population seemed to be low. Four pairs were initially located, but 2 pairs failed to settle and moved on. One pair is known to have raised 2 young and an unconfirmed report suggests that an unrecorded number of young fledged from the eastern fringe of the moors.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur as a breeding species.

Birds were recorded overwintering on the Dee Estuary. Occasional birds were recorded over Danebower and above Macclesfield Forest but no birds settled to breed.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage, several large representative areas are studied annually. After a very poor breeding season in 2016 there was evidence of a modest upturn in fortunes in 2017. Breeding was confirmed at 9 locations with 8 of these nests known to have successfully fledged young. The numbers of young could not be determined. Breeding was also thought possible at a further 4 locations and single birds were noted at another 4 sites in suitable habitat.

Numbers in the uplands in the final quarter appeared to be low.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Breeds very rarely, so no regular monitoring.

There were no reports of confirmed breeding, or of territories being held, in the Greater Manchester area.

All sightings came from the mosslands. In the first winter period there were just 2 sightings of single birds on Little Woolden Moss in January, and the last record was at Cadishead Moss 4th May. In the final quarter records began with 2 at Little Woolden Moss 6th October, with 3 at Croxdens former peatworks 19th December and one thereafter.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring area studied. The Short-eared Owl remains by far the rarest owl within the study area. There was only one breeding record received in 2017 with 2 chicks fledging from a nest in the south Cheviots / MOD Otterburn area. A single bird summered at Kielder. One wintering bird was found predated by an avian predator in the Kielder border forest.

By way of comparison, in areas adjoining north and south Northumberland, outside of the present study area, there are often good populations to be found at Langholm and Geltsdale.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no regular monitoring takes place. There was a paucity of observations this year with only 3 known records. A single bird on the coast late April was probably a returning continental migrant, and there were two sightings on Fylingdales Moor in early March. Low Barn Owl productivity this season suggested vole numbers were not very high which may have been an influencing factor behind the minimal presence of Short-eared Owls across the study area throughout the year.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage, casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Only one successful breeding attempt was recorded in 2017, from which 4 young fledged. Short-eared Owl remains a difficult species to study. They breed in areas that are not easily and safely accessed late in the evening when activity levels may be at their peak.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study. At least 2 sites were occupied on the North Staffordshire moorlands during the breeding season, but the outcomes at both were unknown. In the Upper Derwentdale area only one site seems to have been occupied and again the outcome was unknown. On the eastern moors possibly 2 pairs were present, one of which bred and fledged 2 young. There is also some evidence of persecution on some grouse moors.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage, casual monitoring of a few pairs.

There are no systematic monitoring studies undertaken but a number of potential breeding records are normally reported during fieldwork for other species. In 2017 there were one possible and 2 confirmed breeding pairs located during the course of fieldwork.

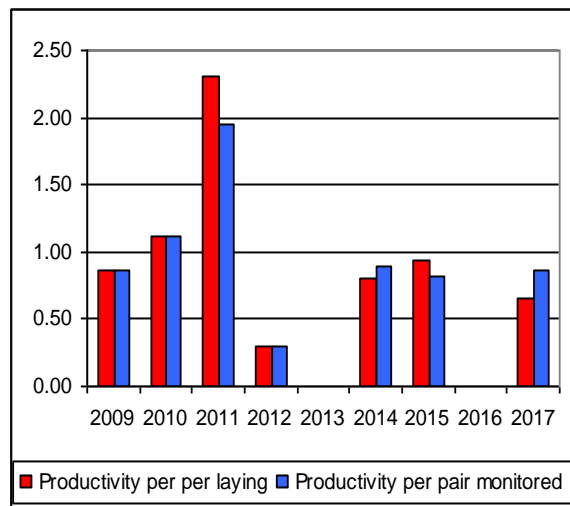
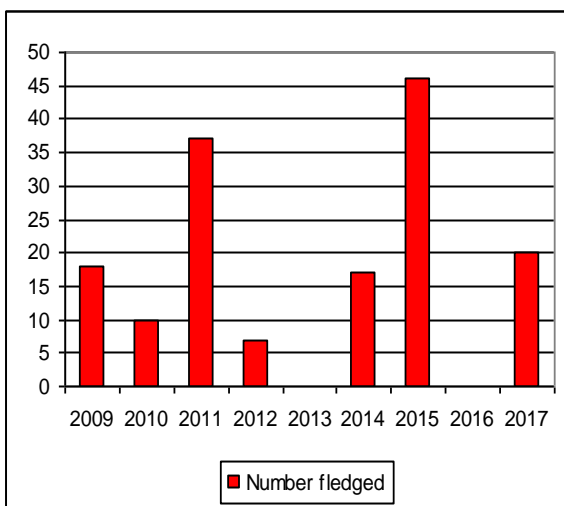
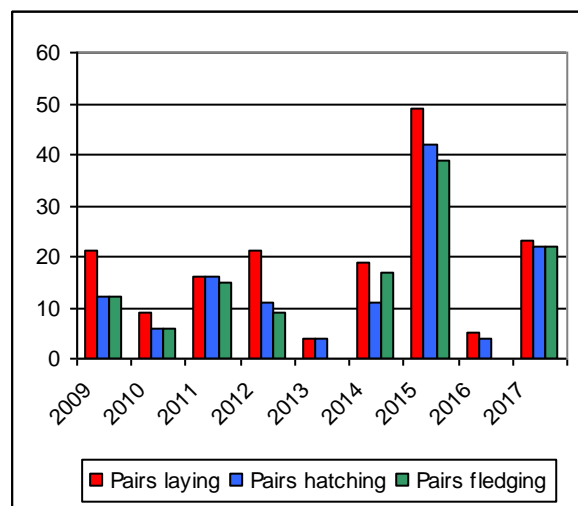
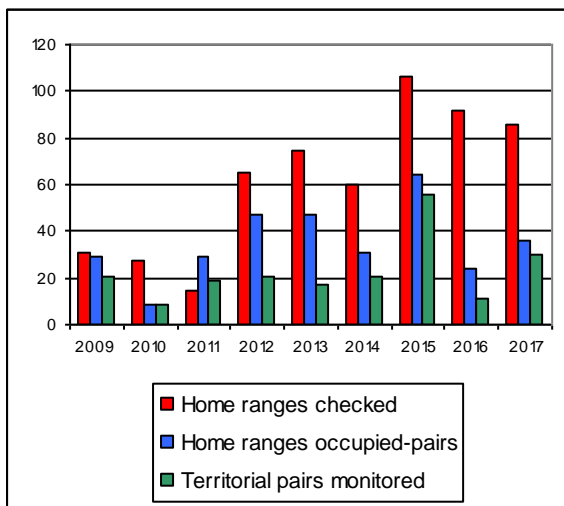
## **NERF regional summary**

In 2015 the NERF Annual Review reported the ‘best year’ since our collective recording began in 2009. In stark contrast, 2016 proved to be the poorest year with just 5 (or perhaps fewer) confirmed nests and no absolute confirmation of successful fledging anywhere. Over each of the last 3 breeding seasons NERF members have visited between 86 and 106 traditional home ranges and whilst not claiming this to be a survey with true “constant effort”

methodology, the annual coverage is in fact reasonably consistent. In the absence of really comprehensive data, some simple indices of abundance can be given based on the results of our volunteers' efforts. In 2015, 49 pairs were found to have settled to nest, this fell to just 5 in 2016 and recovered to 23 in 2017. In 2015 no pairs were recorded as having failed to settle yet this rose to 19 pairs in 2016 and fell back again to 3 pairs in 2017.

The Short-eared Owl remains exceptionally scarce in central Northumberland and the North York Moors. It remains scarce across the whole of the NERF recording area but 2017 did produce a modest increase from the nadir of 2016 with Bowland & Durham leading this trend.

### Comparative data 2009-2017



## Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*



### UK population estimate

The UK population is unknown at the present time but is still likely to be small. At least 3000 are thought to be in captivity.

### Conservation status

UK: No category as not on the British List.  
European: 3: Concern most not in Europe; depleted.  
Global: Least concern

Listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Eagle Owls cannot be released into the wild without a licence from DEFRA. Importation of wild-caught birds has been banned since 2007.

### National and regional threat assessment

It appears that the pilot study into the possible threat to Hen Harriers from Eagle Owls, mentioned in the 2013 Review, has now been abandoned. The chief threat to Eagle Owls breeding in Bowland is human disturbance, with anecdotal information regarding a particular egg collector.

It was estimated in 2008 that an average of 65 captive birds per annum escape annually – based on figures supplied by the Independent Bird Register and numbers registered under an CITES Article 10 certificate – many of these are not re-found. (Melling, Tim *et al.* The Eagle Owl in Britain. *British Birds* 101: September 2008 478-490).

This species is not a priority for RSPB protection as all breeding individuals are considered to be escapees. It is difficult for the 3 fieldworkers covering the Bowland area to protect nesting

pairs as long as this species is not admitted to Category A of the British List where it would need to be listed as a Schedule 1 species under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. Controversy still exists as to whether, historically, Eagle Owls existed in Britain after the Ice Age and whether records in the 19th century are accurate. (Melling *op. cit.*) Within the UK there are many areas which could support this species where persecution would not be an issue, and Eagle Owls seem to be very tolerant of humans working and using the area within their territory for recreation. They are however susceptible to disturbance in the early stages of the breeding cycle and later can become very aggressive in defence of young.

### NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRG	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2

### Group Reports

#### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

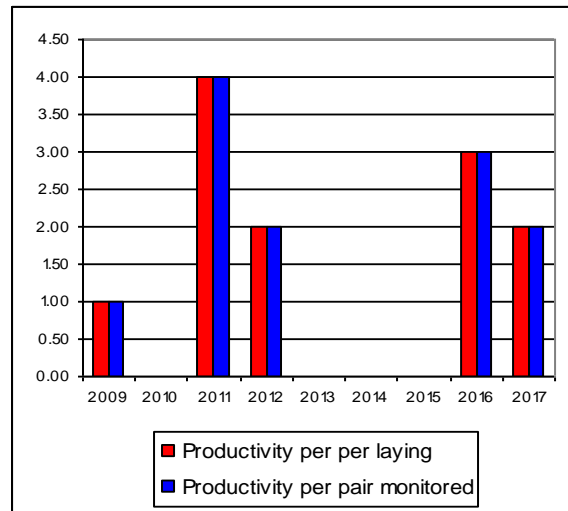
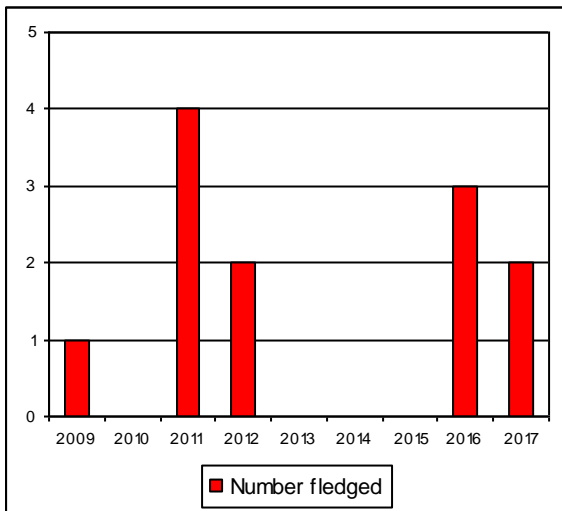
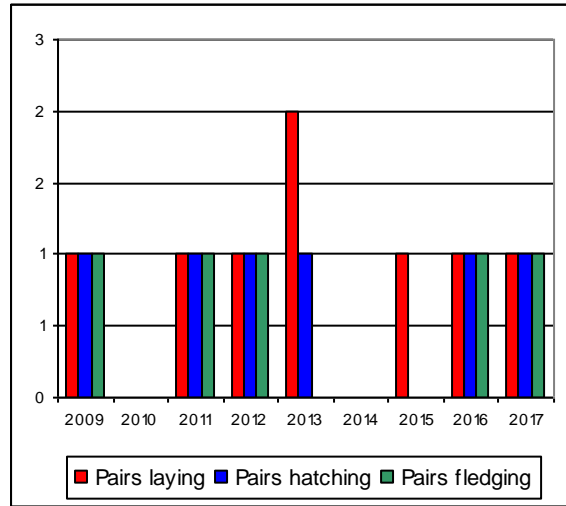
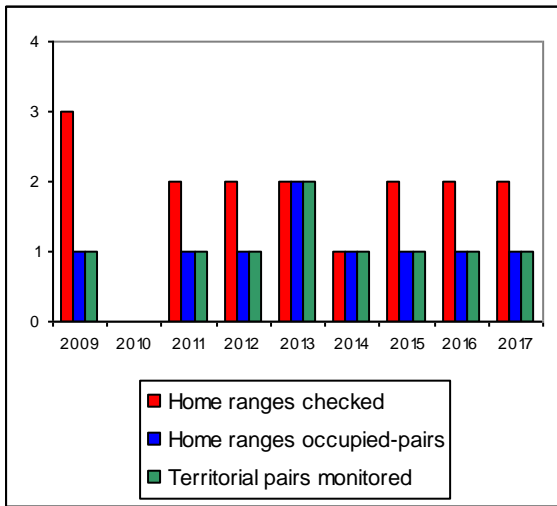
A single pair successfully fledged two chicks. A scrape containing two cold eggs was found close to the successful scrape later in the season, suggesting the pair had moved nest sites halfway through egg-laying.

All other groups reported nil sightings.

#### NERF regional summary

There were no records of breeding by Eagle Owls from any of the regional study areas apart from Bowland, despite suitable habitat in forests such as Kielder. A pair has been breeding, or attempting to breed, at the Bowland site for eight years and a change of female occurred in 2012. There are several reports of sightings away from the main breeding site every year which would suggest there may well be at least one other pair within the study area, but given the secretive nature of the species and remoteness of habitat, pairs could easily be overlooked. This could also apply to other study areas. Persecution and disturbance are the main reasons for failure for this species.

## Comparative data 2009-2017



## Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*



### UK population estimate

The Kestrel is one of the most widespread and abundant raptors in Britain, although it is absent from areas of south-west and central Wales and some upland areas of western Scotland. Densities are highest in central and eastern England. The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey 2017 reported a 21% increase 2016-17, a 22% decrease 2006-2016, and a 20% reduction 1995-2016. Based on material from the BTO Bird Atlas 2007 – 2011, in Britain the Kestrel has lost its position as the most widespread raptor to the Buzzard. The most recent UK population estimate of the species, reported by Musgrove *et al.* 2013 (APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013) was 46,000 individuals. Despite these long-term setbacks the Kestrel is widespread and perhaps the raptor species most readily identified by the general public.

### Conservation status

UK: Amber  
European: 3: Concern, most not in Europe; declining  
Global: Least concern

Listed as vulnerable (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain. *British Birds* 110: September 2017).

### National and regional threat assessment

The population is in decline nationally. This is because the Kestrel population fluctuates and this is linked closely to the availability of prey, largely voles etc., which contribute ca.75% of the species' food supply. When vole numbers are low, a significant percentage of Kestrels may not breed. However, the main threat to the species is associated with incompatible farming practices that reduce available habitat and adversely affect food supply. With the rapidly increasing global demand for food, this situation is unlikely to change without intervention from the EU and the UK Government.

Because many of the NERF member groups do not study this species in depth, the national decline may be being mirrored within the NERF region but going unnoticed.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	3	3	NC	NC	3	3	3	3	11	3.67	3.67
ChRSG	16	16	NC	1	14	13	12	12	46	3.54	3.29
MRG	46	46	NC	NC	37	37	36	36	126	3.41	3.41
NRG	22	22	0	1	13	13	13	12	44	3.38	3.38
NYMUBSG	24	4	NC	4	4	4	4	4	18	4.50	4.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.45</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

This species is currently not closely monitored in Bowland, however broods of between 4 and 6 were found whilst Barn Owl monitoring work was being carried out, suggesting a better breeding season for the species than in 2016.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

The correlation between the number of locally recorded Kestrel sightings and the availability of voles as a primary prey source can be seen by comparing the results of 2015, 2016 and 2017. There was a 50% drop in the number of sightings in 2016, which experienced low vole numbers, when compared to 2015, which was a good vole year. There were 253 sightings in 2016, which jumped to 323 in 2017, another good vole year. This represents an increase of 51.78% reversing the fall in the previous year. Casual monitoring also recorded juvenile birds in several other locations indicating that additional pairs also bred successfully in the study area. However the number of fledglings was not recorded from those sites, therefore they are not reflected in the table above.



### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs. More targeted work is to be undertaken by the Group in future years.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species, but no monitoring takes place. There are no monitoring studies of representative sample populations within the county. Kestrels appear to remain relatively common year-round in upland areas.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study. Well up on last year with 46 confirmed sites. The actual number of young was known at 36 closely-monitored sites (126 young). Peter and Norma Johnson found 9 nests with a total of 33 young (included in the above figures) which gave an average for them of 3.66. There were 3 broods of 6 young (one lost a chick which broke its leg) and many of 4, reflecting the abundance of food also found by Barn and Tawny Owls. Just one site was deserted – on the mosslands; the nest contained five eggs. The city centre pair fledged 4 young this year, and 3 juveniles were taken into care from the Macron Stadium (Bolton Wanderers FC). An analysis of records received from members or reported to [www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com) suggests further probable breeding at 9 sites and possible breeding at a further 9 sites. Groups seen in double figures included 15 on Holcombe Moor on 1st and 4th August, made up of adults and juveniles from 3 families, and 10 at Burnt Edge, Horwich, on 9th August.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study. Data were received from 4 areas in Northumberland, but despite a very good numbers of home ranges checked, it is still a species which is struggling. With the vole population recovering from the very poor year of 2016 the Kestrel population has bounced back to some degree. In 2017 22 home ranges were occupied (16 in 2016); 13 pairs laid eggs fledging a very healthy number of 44 chicks (14 in 2016). The most productive area is still the South Cheviots/MOD Otterburn area, where the bulk of the nesting pairs are to be found (15 of the 22). However, even here raptor workers comment that the uptake of territories remains low.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole National Park area: part upland & part lowland.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least two monitoring studies. A better season than last with reasonably good fledged brood sizes. Had 2 of the regularly occupied boxes been occupied this year, the improvement would probably have been even

**Kestrel Annual Productivity Data – North York Moors  
Large Nestbox Scheme**

Year Band	No. of sites	No. occupied	% occupancy	No. succeeded	Young ringed	Av, per successful nest	Average all nests
1977-81	202	10	4.95	8	32	3.84	3.35
1982-86	174	12	6.9	11	53	4.86	4.5
1987-91	169	22	13	21	90	4.09	4
1992-96	150	20	13.3	19	83	4.5	4.25
1997-2001	109	17	15.6	16	68	4.32	4.16
2002-06	128	19	14.8	15	62	4.1	3.15
2007-11	127	21	16.5	19	84	4.42	4
2012-16	120	18	15	12	49	4.08	2.72
2017	24	4	16.7	18	4.5	4.5	4.5

(2017 in isolation obviously cannot be compared directly to earlier data in the table)

more marked. Annoyingly, the reason for non-occupation was undoubtedly due to the loss of nest material from the boxes, with wind turbulence presumably being the cause. The table above gives the breeding performance from the South Cleveland Ringing Group scheme in five-year bandwidths. The 2016 report erroneously quoted a 49 year period in relation to productivity in the table when in fact the period involved was only 39 years.

### **NERF regional summary**

Nationally the Common Kestrel population is known to be declining. However, from the data collected across the NERF region, it appears that the species is faring reasonably well in some areas. All groups report Kestrels as present in their respective study areas, although only few groups undertake any detailed monitoring of the species, with the best results being produced by nest box schemes. It is therefore difficult to assess the current status of the species without comparative quantitative data from all areas. This is perhaps an issue that needs to be addressed by all NERF members in future years.

## Merlin *Falco columbarius*



### UK population estimate

The UK population estimate from the last national survey of this species in 2008, (Ewing, S.R. *et al.* Breeding status of Merlins *Falco columbarius* in the UK in 2008. 2011. *Bird Study* 58:4 379-389), was 1162 pairs. This represented a 13% decrease overall from the previous survey carried out over 1993/94 with the decrease for England alone being 25%.

Holling, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2016 *in press* recorded 280-396 pairs monitored.

Listed as Endangered (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain. *British Birds* 110: September 2017).

### Conservation status

UK: **Red**

The 4th review of *Birds of Conservation Concern* published in December 2015 returned this species to the UK Red List based on evidence from various monitoring schemes that indicate continuing worrying declines in breeding populations. (The species was moved from the Red to Amber category following the second Review in 2009.)

European: Not of concern as far as is known.

Global: Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

### National and regional threat assessment

Persecution of this species in all the usual ways by grouse moor gamekeepers is generally a thing of the past. Keepers are well aware these birds do not present any problems for them in regard to predation of young grouse and are on the whole happy to tolerate nesting pairs on their moors. Currently absorption of contaminants in the environment via prey consumption is potentially the most serious problem with which the species has to contend and levels are routinely monitored by CEH through egg and corpse analyses.

Reduced prey availability during the breeding season seems to be an increasing problem in many upland areas and in some cases is considered to be causing pairs severe difficulties provisioning broods: such insufficiencies may even be deterring pairs from actually nesting.

It is also quite possibly a factor featuring at wintering areas with birds failing to achieve pre-season breeding condition and subsequently not attempting to nest when back on breeding territories. Another worrying, increasing man-made problem for the birds is that of excessive burning-out of old heather stands on many of the intensive commercial grouse moors, making it difficult for them to find suitable nest beds.

Clutch and brood losses to foxes, mustelids, other larger raptors, humans and even adders at nest sites do occur but not to an extent that affected population levels adversely in the past when numbers in the uplands were much higher than of now. At present with such low numbers of breeding pairs in Calderdale, the Peak District and North York Moors, any nest failures in these areas represent losses that could well have a damaging effect on populations already under significant pressures.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSG	25	12	0	0	12	12	12	12	45	3.75	3.75
CRSG	6	4	0	1	3	3	3	3	9	3.00	3.00
DUBSG	75	38	2	2	38	35	32	32	121	3.45	3.18
NRG	63	18	1	1	17	17	12	9	27	1.58	1.58
NYMUBSG	44	13	0	0	13	13	11	10	27	2.08	2.08
PDRMG	40	23	2	0	23	14	13	13	46	3.29	2.00
SPRSG	11	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	4	4.00	2.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>2.94</b>	<b>2.58</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

2017 was a fairly good breeding season for this species in Bowland. In the area that is most intensively-monitored, pairs bred at sites that Merlins have been absent from for a number of years, and the species had its best breeding season for over 25 years. However, in other parts of Bowland, Merlin territories are much-reduced due, in large part, to intensive habitat

management for driven grouse shooting; extensive stands of deep heather are few and far between now.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

During 2017 sightings of Merlin were received every month. The number of observations was up from 31 in 2016 to 58 in 2017, an increase of 87.1%. Regrettably the increase in sightings did not translate to an increase in recorded breeding attempts, which were recorded at 4 sites; unfortunately one of these failed early in the season. Monitoring at the successful sites is undertaken by an independent ringer who is not a member of the Calderdale Raptor Study Group. He reported that at one site 2 young were seen after fledging and it is possible that other chicks also fledged from this nest. Two nests, producing 3 and 4 chicks respectively were only a kilometre apart, and whilst this is not unknown it is unusual in Calderdale.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

**Level of monitoring:** Upland areas only.

No breeding records to report. A number of birds winter on the Dee Estuary and individuals occasionally turn up at passage times both there and elsewhere in the county.

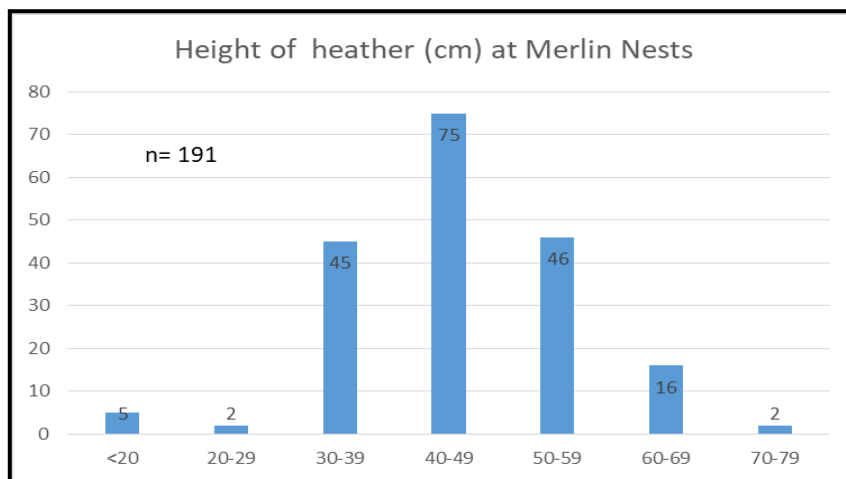
### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Unfortunately not all traditional nesting areas could be visited in the northern part of the county this year. Nevertheless the overall number of pairs found settling to breed was still quite high which suggests that the total population, (had coverage allowed), will have remained strong and stable. Of 32 known successful nests 121 young fledged of which 91 were ringed. A nestling ringed on 7th July near Middleton-in-Teesdale was found dying at Newbiggin-on-Sea, Northumberland on 1st August; a movement of 72 km NE.

The height of heather at nests has been recorded in one study area. The results are shown below for the years 1993-2017.



There were no significant differences in heather height selection within different bands of elevation above sea level.

The size of the heather patches is highly variable and appears to be a more catholic choice, ranging from very small, (less than 4 square metres), to extremely large continuous patches. A territory holding a mosaic of heather patches of differing sizes and of different ages (heights) is required.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Breeds very occasionally.

There was one nesting attempt in the SE of the county, monitored by the PDRMG, which failed; (included in PDRMG figures). During the breeding season there were also occasional sightings in the bog above Dovestones RSPB reserve, and from Castleshaw, where breeding has occurred in the past.

Outside the breeding season records were primarily from the mosslands - Little Woolden Moss, Carrington Moss and Highfield Moss - with occasional sightings at major waters. Six records came from the vismig watchpoint on Winter Hill between 2nd September and 21st October including 3 on 2nd October, mostly flying south.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part of upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least 2 monitoring studies or large representative study area.

After the optimistic outcome of the 2016 breeding season when a very healthy 48 chicks fledged, 2017 disappointingly turned out to be a poor year for the species. Only 18 territories were found to be occupied, 17 pairs of which were thought to have laid eggs, fledging 27 chicks. The Border Forest at Kielder had its second worst-ever breeding season, with not only low occupation of sites but just one nest fledging 2 chicks. Other parts of the county surveyed, although also experiencing poorer occupation than in 2016, did manage to produce good brood sizes – fours and fives being recorded.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least 2 monitoring studies or large representative study area.

There was a welcome increase in the number of nesting pairs from 9 in 2016 to 13 this season, although one brood died (cause unknown), one clutch failed to hatch and was eventually abandoned, and the outcome was unknown for another pair post-incubation period: 18 chicks were ringed. There has at least been stabilisation and small improvement of the population over the past 5 years with the number of pairs nesting almost doubling from the nadir seasons of 2012/13 when only 7 nesting pairs were recorded in each. However, productivity over the same period has varied little with between 21 and 30 known young recorded each season.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Merlin numbers remain stable but lower than the historical levels of the 1990s. Fledging rates continue to be very good for pairs that breed successfully.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

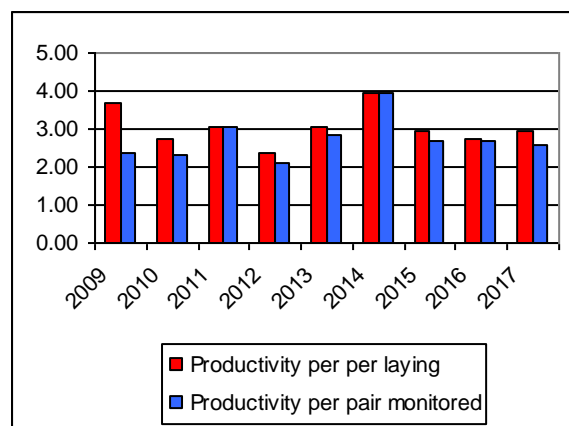
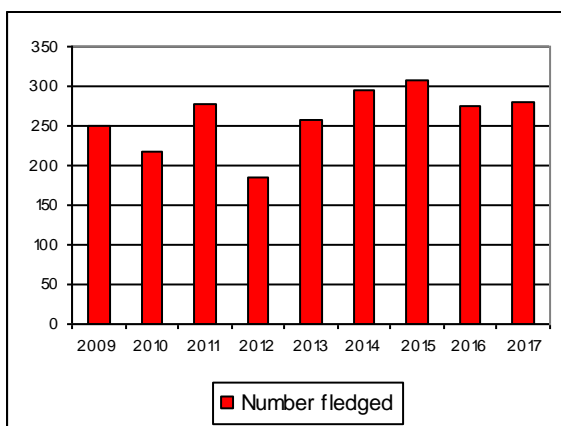
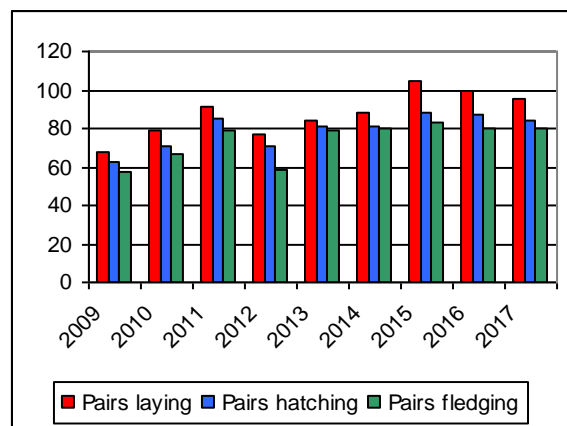
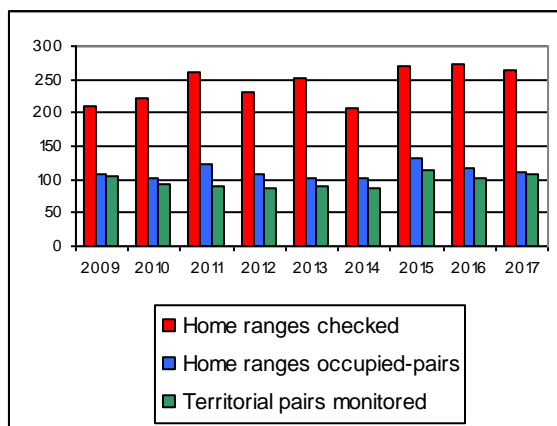
**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage. Within the SPRSG areas no breeding pairs were located on the Staffordshire moorlands in 2017, whilst in the Upper Derwent area just 2 pairs were located, one of which fledged 4 young: these were all ringed and 2 of the young were PIT-tagged. The other pair failed, the reason being unclear, with only the female present on site in late June. As in 2016, there was no breeding on the eastern moors, with only sporadic sightings of single birds up to late February and from the end of August. As there is still ample suitable habitat for the species on the eastern moors, the absence of breeding pairs there needs in-depth study.

### NERF regional summary

Apart from Durham, most upland areas appear to have experienced either a moderate or poor season. It is disappointing that Northumberland, in particular, after encouraging returns in 2016, regressed markedly again. There is no doubt at all that Merlins, for one or more reasons, with the exception of the Durham moors, are under pressure across northern England. Clearly the threats to the welfare of the species mentioned above are playing significant roles in the downturn of its fortunes over the last couple of decades, and climate change is another unquantified factor that may also be contributing to the birds' problems. Obviously nothing in the short term can be done about climate and prey shortages but certainly further decimation of heather habitat on grouse moors can and should be outlawed by the powers-that-be.

### Comparative data 2009-2017



## Hobby *Falco subbuteo*



### UK population estimate

In 2009 the UK population was estimated to be 2,800 pairs. (Musgrove *et al.* 2013. APEP 3: *British Birds* 106, February 2013). The BTO's BBS Report for 2017 shows a 1% decrease for England 2016-2017, a 10% decrease 2006-16 and a 12% decrease 1995-2016. Clements (2001) estimated the UK population to be in the region of 2,200 breeding pairs, but following the large-scale expansion in range from southern England to the north, west and east, the species being widespread south of a line from the Humber to the Mersey, (with the exception of west Wales and Cornwall), and bearing in mind there is some evidence of breeding as far north as the Scottish Highlands, the current figure is probably considerably higher. Further research, based on a combined 60 years of fieldwork in 3 counties, (Kent, Hertfordshire and Derbyshire), along with evidence from many other counties, suggests that the current UK Hobby population may be best expressed as a broad estimate of around 5000 territorial pairs, but it is recognised that more data on breeding density is required from marginal areas for that figure to be widely accepted. (Clements, R. *et al.* The Hobby in Britain: a revised population estimate. *British Birds* 109: June 2016). The RBBP gave a figure of 275-689 breeding pairs in 2016 (Holling, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2016 *in press*).

### Conservation status

UK: **Green**

European: Not of concern

Global: Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981



## National and regional threat assessment

Formerly rare, and confined to southern heathland areas, Hobbies are now becoming widespread in farmland across lowland England, and in a few upland areas, especially moorland edges with scattered trees. Hobbies are secretive and breed later than most other species, and both these factors can lead to under-recording. The easiest way to locate breeding pairs is to check for fledging success from mid August, when the young are most vociferous and can be heard from a considerable distance, and this has proved a useful method of finding new pairs. When checking known breeding sites, returning birds can sometimes be seen perched on conspicuous dead trees in the area.

Fieldworkers studying this species should be reminded that a Schedule 1 Licence is required if nests are to be visited or for any other monitoring purpose that might cause disturbance of the nesting pair.

There are no specific threats associated with this species at the present time. However whilst the population has increased significantly in recent years it still remains relatively low and fieldworkers should be mindful of the continuing threat posed by egg collectors. 2017 was thought to be a more productive breeding season than 2016.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
MRG	7	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
NRG	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PDRSG	19	19	0	0	15	15	15	15	30+	2.00	2.00
SPRSG	42	40	NC	6	34	30	30	30	57+	1.90*	1.70*
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>89+</b>	<b>1.93+</b>	<b>1.78+</b>

\* Understated calculation: does not take into account nests where young fledged but numbers were not known. See group text below for more details.

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species, but no monitoring takes place. Several individuals are seen most years hawking insects among the fells, but breeding pairs are confined to the farmland and we have been unable to locate nests mainly due to the extensive habitat and access issues.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part of upland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

There were 7 records of Hobby across the study area between the end of May and the end of August. Three individuals were seen together hawking moths on 21st July. More importantly 2 juveniles were observed chasing adults whilst calling for food during the last week in August. This is the first confirmed breeding attempt in Calderdale.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

A few birds were reported at several well-watched lowland areas and more rarely on moorland fringes, but there was no confirmation of breeding in the county. It is likely that a few pairs breed as yet undetected.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

There was no confirmed breeding this year, but an analysis of records submitted to [www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com) and by members revealed one definite territory and several probable ones. The analysis was carried out bearing in mind that young Hobbies don't fledge until August.

As usual, Little Woolden Moss and adjoining areas had very regular sightings from 3rd May until 28th September, with 2 birds first recorded on 13th May. Birds which were aged included a first summer bird first seen on 9th May, 3 times in June and once in August, and a juvenile on 22nd September. The attraction of this area for Hobbies is the abundance of Black Darter dragonflies. However no nest was found and a pair is known to breed just across the River Glaze in Cheshire.

Elsewhere, 6 locations had enough sightings to suggest probable or possible breeding.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

After the excitement of having a pair in 2016, it was back to normal with only 3 sightings in the NRG recording area. Two singles were seen in the South Cheviots/MOD Otterburn area, and a single adult hunting dragonflies was recorded in the Border Forest, Kielder.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Not known to occur here as a breeding species.

Not a study species of the Group. Has been reported as "thin on the ground" this year, regular observers recording fewer sightings than usual. Although there was no confirmation of breeding in the study area, 2 immatures flying around together on Goathland Moor on 4th August may possibly have been of local origin. A brood of 4 was reported from a locality on Westerdale Moor on 28th July. The area was checked a few days later, but the birds were not

located- it is most probable that they were Merlins as the fledging date would be exceptionally early for young Hobbies on the wing.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage, at least two monitoring studies or large representative study areas.

In Cheshire 3 pairs fledged 7 young, one pair failed due to infertile eggs; 2 nests in woodland were not located, but birds were present and showing all the expected behaviour of pairs feeding young; however no fledging count was undertaken. In Yorkshire 12 nesting attempts were recorded, (10 nests located), from which at least 23 young fledged.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Anthony Messenger confirmed that in his main 10km square core study area in south Derbyshire, 7 pairs were present, (where there are usually 8 or 9). Six pairs were successful, with one pair definitely failing. Thirteen young fledged from the successful sites, of which 10 were ringed, (2.17 per successful pair, 1.86 per breeding pair present).

Across the whole of Anthony's general study area there were 24 pairs present, (including the core area). Twenty-two pairs were successful, one definite failure and one site where the outcome was unknown, although failure was suspected. Forty-nine young fledged, (2.23 per successful pair, 2.04 per breeding pair present). A total of 29 young were ringed.

An interesting observation was recorded by Anthony as follows: *at one site two young were successfully reared in a fairly exposed Ash tree nest, despite regular disturbance by corvids, (mainly Jackdaws), which were roosting in a small wood c.80m from the nest. On a number of occasions prior to and post-roosting, several Jackdaws were seen perching on the edge of the nest while the female was incubating and also during the young rearing stage.*

In NE Derbyshire and the Peak District, Roy Frost, Mick Lacey and Mick Taylor reported that at least 8 pairs were successful and juveniles were seen at various sites. Two further pairs were thought to have failed at an early stage, and pairs were present at 6 more sites in the recording area but with no evidence of breeding.

At 2 other regular sites, no birds were present in 2017.

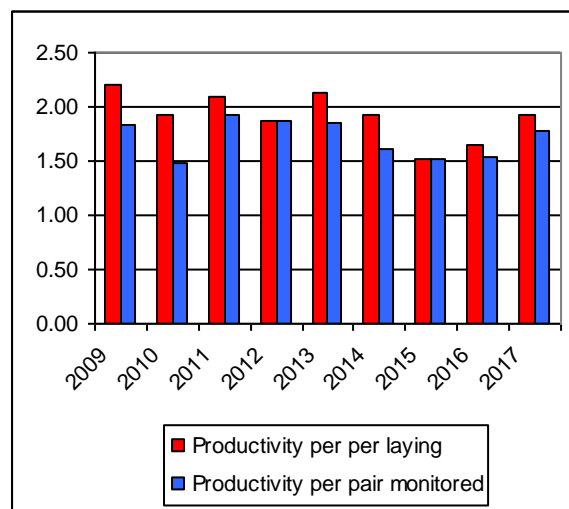
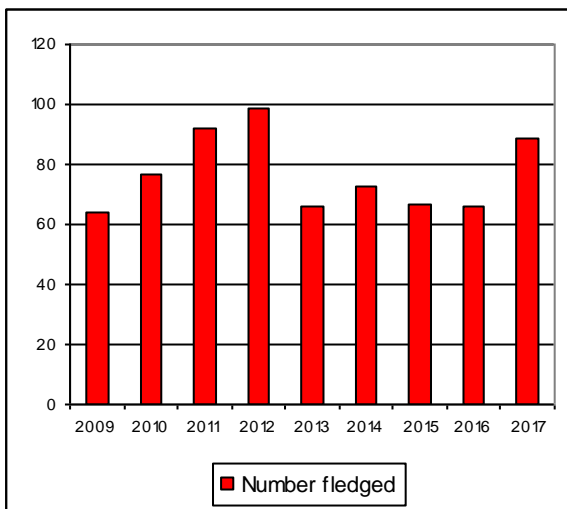
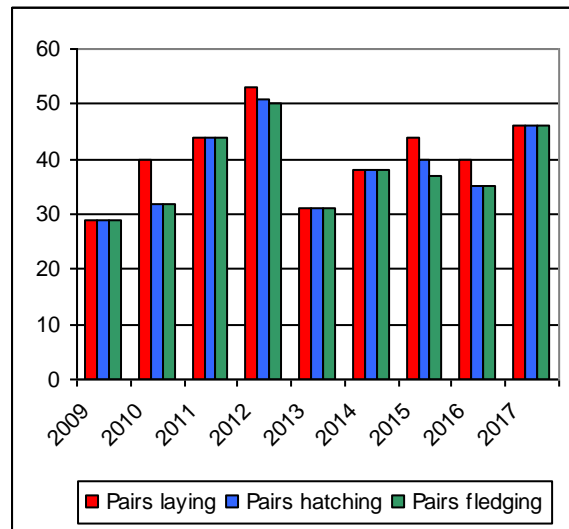
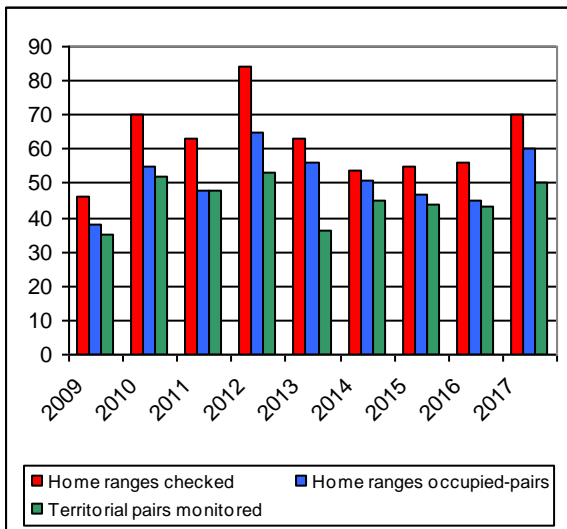
### **NERF regional summary**

A considerable amount of work is undertaken by NERF Group members, particularly in the Peak District and South Peak Raptor Study Group areas. Hobbies were observed across the region and known to have bred successfully in 3 study areas, and are no doubt considerably overlooked in some other RSG areas.

### **Colour ringing**

A colour-ringing scheme was in operation for this species from 2004 to 2010 and to assist with this project raptor workers are requested to report all sightings of colour-ringed birds via the website at [www.ring.ac](http://www.ring.ac), or alternatively the information can be passed to Jim Lennon at [lennons@shearwater50.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:lennons@shearwater50.fsnet.co.uk)

## Comparative data 2009-17



## Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*



### UK population estimate

The BTO conducted the 6th national survey in 2014 and this gave a figure of 1769 pairs in the UK, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands (Wilson, M.W. *et al.* The breeding population of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* in the United Kingdom, Isle of Man and Channel Islands in 2014. 2018. *Bird Study* 65:1 1-19). This showed a 22% increase on the previous survey in 2002. The 2017 BBS figures showed an increase of 13% 2016-17, a decline of 13% 2006-16 and a 50% increase 1995-2016. Holling, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2016 *in press* gives a figure of 811-1072 breeding pairs.

### Conservation status

UK: **Green**

European: Not of concern

Global: Least concern

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

### National and regional threat assessment

The greatest threat to this species was undoubtedly the use of DDT in the 1950s. When this chemical was banned that particular threat was removed. Regrettably this is not the case with persecution, which is now the most serious threat faced by Peregrines. They are targeted by four groups: egg collectors; gamekeepers; those taking eggs on the point of hatch or chicks, sometimes to be smuggled overseas, and pigeon fanciers. Over the last two years this last threat has been increasing at a significant rate. Although research shows that racing pigeon losses to Peregrines are extremely low, in some parts of the country, particularly at sites close to the urban fringe, it is apparent that pigeon fanciers are responsible for persecuting Peregrines. However, those pairs nesting in boxes or trays on public buildings in city centres are generally safe from direct interference, but there can also be problems inherent to the roofs of high buildings in public places. These include urgent roof repairs, air conditioning malfunctions, and disturbance from fireworks and other human activities at ground level.

Health and Safety legislation and the need to employ a qualified steeplejack to check and renovate nest trays, which can easily develop drainage problems, are other considerations – all often require tact and diplomacy to overcome with building managers who are unfamiliar with raptors and the law.

The threats faced by Peregrines on grouse moors in some NERF areas continue unabated and it is clear that the large number of breeding attempt failures can only be attributed to human interference. Raptor workers must remain vigilant in the face of these on-going problems if Peregrines are to go unmolested across the whole of their natural range.

## NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSBG	20	6	0	2	4	4	3	3	7	1.75	1.75
CaRSG	3	3	0	0	3	3	2	2	6	2.00	2.00
ChRSG	5	5	NC	2	5	3	3	3	6	2.00	1.20
DUBSG	14	2	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
MRG	14	14	0	1	14	12	12	9	26	2.17	1.86
NRG	40	18	2	10	8	8	6	6	15	1.88	1.88
NYMUBSG	4	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	3	3.00	3.00
PDRMG	21	6	1	4	6	1	0	0	0	0	0
SPRSG	40	32	1	4	28	18	18	18	46	2.56	1.64
YD&NRSG	17	7	0	NC	5	6	5	5	8	1.33	1.60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>1.54</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

2016 was the first year in over two decades in which not a single Peregrine Falcon chick fledged from the recording area, so 2017 could not have been any worse for this species in Bowland. In 2017, 2 pairs managed to fledge 5 chicks between them, but many historically productive home ranges remained unoccupied, and persecution linked to intensive driven grouse shooting remains the primary reason for the species' precarious situation in Bowland.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

**Level of monitoring:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

Disappointingly during 2016 the Group received only 70 reports throughout the year.

Consequently a great effort was made to monitor the species during 2017. This additional effort resulted in the receipt of 125 reports, which represented an increase of 79%.

Discounting the pair that returned to a traditional site after a brief absence, unfortunately this extra effort did not result in an increase in the number of breeding pairs normally present in the study area.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study.

A chick from the Thelwall viaduct on the M6 was found with an injured wing and damaged tail on the bank of the Manchester Ship Canal. Despite the best care, it developed aspergillosis and had to be euthanised.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

All traditional (historic) eyries in the uplands were once again checked. Pairs were present at 2 sites very early in the season and a single male at another but none settled to attempt breeding.

Away from the uplands, but excluding Teesmouth, the lowland population of County Durham appears stable but at a disappointingly low level of about 5-6 pairs. This year 5 sites saw breeding but only 3 of these were successful with just 8 young fledged.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

There was breeding or attempted breeding at 13 sites; 26 chicks fledged at 9 of these and at the remaining 3 sites, one failed due to human interference and 2 due to natural causes. A further site in Greater Manchester is monitored by PDRMG and therefore excluded from this summary.

Five extra sites are included this year in the total of 13, due to the expansion of our recording area. At the CIS tower, 3 chicks were ringed and all were seen the day before fledging, apparently in good health. However, although one fledged the following day, the remaining 2 were never seen, and this mystery was solved in February 2018 when their dessicated remains were found in the nest tray. The female here (pictured above) is a 2003 chick ringed at Chichester cathedral, and has bred here or at another site nearby since 2006 and is currently paired with her son, born 2015.

Small chicks died due to weather at two working quarries where the management was extremely co-operative: Marshalls, which owns one of them, had installed CCTV which proved that there was no human interference, and at the other, the nest was in the path of a drainage channel and the very young chicks succumbed in a night of heavy rain. At another Marshalls quarry, CCTV and extensive publicity around the site ensured that 2 chicks fledged after several years of failure/theft. Unfortunately, at yet another working quarry, the pattern of failure since 2012 continued, with the police involved after a first attempt was destroyed by blasting (the management knew its location). A second attempt failed for reasons unknown, but the actions of an employee seen (and photographed) waving a long pole with a

camera attached to the end over a cliff edge above the nest cannot have helped. Due to police procedural failures no action could be taken against the owners.

Rochdale Town Hall installed a camera at its nest site with footage on the council website, and this was extremely popular with a maximum of 2000 views daily; all 4 chicks fledged. At other territories, a new young female at a site used successfully last year meant that there was no breeding; Manchester Airport again withheld permission for a nest tray for a pair reportedly present for several years, due to Health and Safety considerations (not included in the table due to our inability to monitor), and a pair was present throughout the year in Chadderton, frequenting a mill tower, but no proof of breeding was found. The pair that wintered in Wigan for the 4th year again returned to Chorley to nest successfully there; this site (St George's Church) now falls within our expanded recording area.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

2017 is nearly a carbon copy of the poor season in 2016, with the Peregrine still struggling, and for all the same reasons. With 18 home ranges occupied by pairs (the same as 2016) only 8 pairs were thought to have laid eggs.

Nesting pairs on both upland moors and lower quarries were both affected, with adults appearing not to get into breeding condition. Persecution must be playing a part, although nothing has yet been proven.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

The one successful nest was at a new quarry site just outwith the southern edge of the study area: the brood was ringed. The coastal cliff site that failed in 2016 due to unavoidable excessive disturbance not surprisingly was not occupied this season. However, there were strong rumours that a pair had bred successfully further south on the cliffs. One of the 2 regular sites was not occupied but the other seemed to be so when displaying birds were observed at the site in early March, but several lengthy visits over the next 2 months failed to produce any evidence of nesting or occupation there. Oddly though, on 4th July an adult carrying large prey - thought to be a pigeon - was watched for several minutes from a point well north of the site flying on a line leading to a point somewhat south of the usual nest site. It was heading with some difficulty into quite a stiff wind and there seemed little reason for it to be doing so unless it was provisioning a brood. It does seem therefore that there is probably an alternative nest site in the district that needs to be located as soon as possible. Elsewhere, a pair may well have bred on Huntcliffe where a pair was regularly seen throughout the month of April, and successful breeding was recorded at Boulby by non-members of the Merlin Group.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Six territories were found to be occupied by pairs in 2017 and one by at least a single bird. Of the territories known to be occupied by pairs, disappointingly only one was proven to have laid eggs; this pair failed at the egg stage and when combined with SPRSG sites in the Dark Peak, for the first time since 1984, when the species first recolonised the area, there were no successful Peregrine Falcon breeding attempts in the Dark Peak in 2017.



### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

In the SPRSG recording area 40 home ranges were checked in 2017, including 4 traditional sites in the Upper Derwent Valley, where 2 were found to be occupied in the early part of the season. Further repeat visits found both these territories to be vacant, and in one case – at Alport Castles - where the pair had previously consisted of 2 adult birds, one of the pair had been replaced by an immature bird (a classic sign of persecution). The eventual failure at this site follows 3 consecutive successful years in 2014 – 2016 after a run of 6 failures since the last breeding success in 2007.

Of the remaining 36 sites checked, 5 were thought to be unoccupied, but reports from a quarry worker at one of these sites suggested that an adult pair was in fact present and may have bred. At a further site initially logged as untenanted, an adult female and two calling juveniles were seen in July by a member engaged in other conservation work in the dale, suggesting possible successful breeding here for the first time. At one site in NE Derbyshire – thought to have been robbed last year- only single birds were seen early in the season and a pair in late June, although no breeding was suspected.

Pairs were seen to be present at 30 sites outside the Upper Derwent area; at 2 locations pairs were seen early in the season only. The installation of a nest camera at the Roaches may have contributed to the lack of a successful outcome for the Peregrine nesting attempt at this site, as the camera was highly conspicuous. A pair seen regularly over Longstone Edge was assumed to have moved to a crag in a nearby dale and was not seen again at Longstone Edge – this pair bred for the first time at this new location and raised 3 young. At a further site in Dovedale, where adults were seen on 3 visits, the nest site couldn't be confirmed, but the pair probably bred.

Of the remaining 27 confirmed breeding pairs, 2 sites were suspected of having been robbed (one of chicks, one of eggs) and a further 7 failed - some suspiciously, others perhaps not. There were 3 urban sites as usual: Derby Cathedral, Sheffield St. George's Church and Belper East Mill; a total of 10 young fledged from these sites, with the 3 young in Sheffield being ringed by member Steve Samworth. The male at the Derby site was a new BTO ringed bird. These 10 young are not included in the totals in the table.

From the remaining 15 successful sites at least 36 chicks fledged successfully. The two NE Derbyshire quarries were successful, with 3 young reared at each.

At one site in the SPRSG area Steve Downing and RSPB re-homed 2 youngsters rescued from Clee Hill in Shropshire, after the adult pair were found poisoned; 3 chicks were rescued: one went to Salisbury Cathedral and featured on BBC Television's Springwatch, while the other two came to a successful site in our area and joined the 3 chicks there; all 5 youngsters fledged successfully in late June.

Three new breeding sites were discovered this year: the dale site previously mentioned fledged 3 young; a new quarry site had a breeding pair which may have moved from one of 2 nearby unoccupied sites - but the birds unfortunately failed. In the Manifold Valley the birds were assumed to have moved from the previous traditional site and fledged 3 young on another natural crag, after the National Trust closed the climbing face there.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Yorkshire Dales: Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage; Nidderdale: at least one long-term monitoring study.

An average year, but slightly higher nest success than in previous years. Once again, no birds nested on managed grouse moors.

At one site an immature female was paired with an adult male. There were some signs of incubation but it is not clear if any eggs were laid. One pair failed at egg stage.

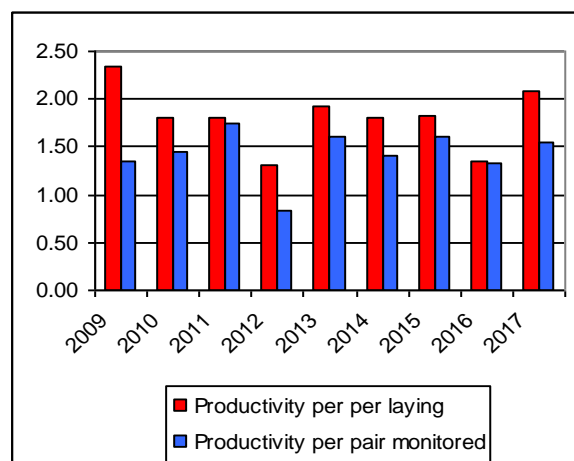
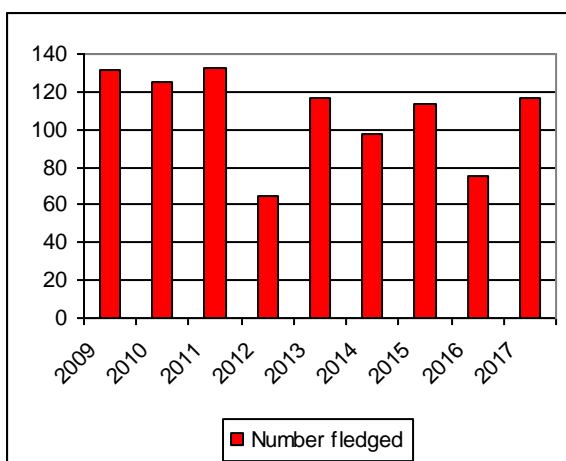
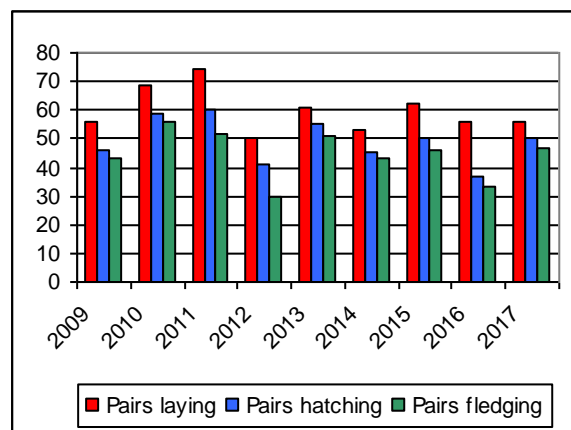
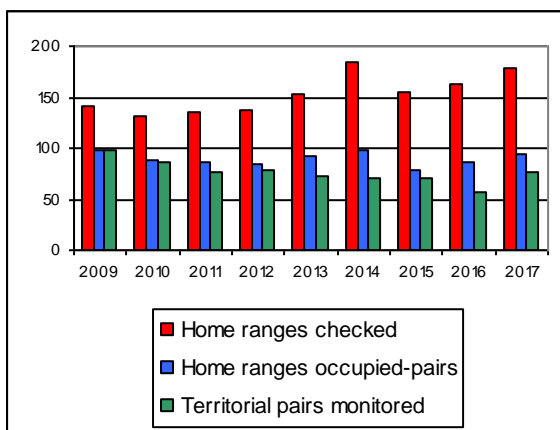
### NERF regional summary

The majority of NERF groups cover moorland areas, and there was no improvement, other than in Bowland, in the number of pairs nesting, due to illegal killing and disturbance by those who see the birds as a threat to grouse. There *is* room for improvement at working quarries, as instanced by the enhanced security provided by Marshalls in the Manchester area. Other groups could perhaps apply pressure on the owners of working quarries where there is a history of failure, through the Mineral Products Association's Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Group or the local police. A list of MPA members can be found at:

[http://www.mineralproducts.org/cont\\_members01.htm](http://www.mineralproducts.org/cont_members01.htm)

The 22% increase shown in the 2014 national survey is accounted for by the dramatic increase in the number of Peregrine pairs taking up residence on suitable buildings in our major towns and cities. The installation of cameras at several of these sites has brought the breeding cycle of this iconic species to many members of the general public who would otherwise have no chance of seeing it. Rochdale Town Hall, for example, attracted 10,000 views per week and a maximum of 2000 per day. These urban peregrines also provide a pool of birds who may try to re-populate moorland areas where they are likely to be persecuted. Colour-ringing is providing a lot of information about the movements of this species.

### Comparative data 2009-2017



## Common Raven *Corvus corax*



### UK population estimate

In 2009 the population was estimated at 7400 pairs in the UK (Musgrove *et al.* 2013. APEP 3: *British Birds* 106: February 2013). The 2017 BTO Breeding Bird Survey showed a 6% decrease 2016-17, a 33% increase 2006-16 and a 68 % increase 1995-2016, for England.

### Conservation status

UK:	Green
European:	Not of concern
Global:	Least concern

### National and regional threat assessment

Nationally the Raven population is slowly recovering. However, persecution remains a serious problem in some of the NERF study areas, particularly birds come into conflict with the game-shooting community and sheep farmers who claim that they can be a threat to new-born lambs.

There is no scientific, peer reviewed, data to show that Ravens are having a significant impact on waders or lambs which tend to be born at lower altitudes away from heather moorland. Nonetheless, Natural England issues licences to kill ‘a small number’ of birds in Berkshire, Wiltshire and Dorset in the south and Derbyshire and Lancashire in the North of England. Ravens may occasionally be a problem in some areas and it may be appropriate for Natural England to issue a lethal control licence in extreme circumstances where non-lethal methods have failed.

Unfortunately the licensing process lacks transparency and therefore it is not possible to know:

- what the procedures are by which NE decides that lethal control is necessary and that a cull will not have a negative impact on the local, or national population;
- what non-lethal methods were tried before the licences were issued;
- why did the non-lethal methods fail;
- how many licences have NE issued;
- the total number of birds involved;
- having issued licences, will there be a rolling program of annual renewal?

In addition to the lethal control licences recently there has been a proliferation of gas guns being used in the uplands, to deter Ravens from settling to breed including on and adjacent to Sites of Special Scientific Interest and in Specially Protected Areas that are designated as such for rare and vulnerable birds.

### NERF Data

<b>RAPTOR STUDY GROUP</b>	<b>Home ranges checked</b>	<b>Home Ranges occupied by pairs</b>	<b>Single birds</b>	<b>Pairs failing to settle</b>	<b>Territorial pairs monitored throughout season</b>	<b>Known Pairs laying eggs</b>	<b>Known pairs hatching eggs</b>	<b>Known pairs fledging young</b>	<b>Known number of fledged young</b>	<b>Young fledged per pair laying</b>	<b>Young fledged per territorial pair monitored</b>
BRSRG	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	NC	NC	NC
CaRSG	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	4	4.00	4.00
ChRSG	1	1	NR	NR	1	1	1	1	5	5.00	5.00
DUBSG	8	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
MRG	4	4	NC	NC	3	3	2	2	9	3.00	3.00
NRG	37	22	2	3	19	17	17	15	30+	2.10	1.90
NYM	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
PDRSG	11	6	0	0	3	3	3	3	9	3.00	3.00
SPRSG	45	45	NC	NC	23	23	23	23	NC	NC	NC
YD&NRSG	18	8	0	0	8	8	7	7	27	3.38	3.38
<b>TOTAL</b>	129	90	3	5	60	57	55	53	84+	1.47*	1.40*

\* Understated calculation: does not take into account nests where young fledged but numbers were not known. See group text below for more details.

## Group Reports

### **Bowland Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

A single pair was found to have bred successfully in 2017. It is possible that further pairs may breed undetected elsewhere in Bowland. However, it is likely that persecution is still suppressing the local population.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least two monitoring studies or large representative study area.

The depressingly low Raven population in Calderdale continues to give the Group cause for concern. In view of the historical downward trend in the number of sightings received annually, the Group dedicated significant resources to surveying for Raven during late winter 2016 and at the start of the breeding season in early spring 2017. Whilst this additional effort resulted in a 110.2% increase in sightings when compared to 2016, the Group once again only located one pair which bred on a traditional crag.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

The Group does not comprehensively monitor this species and the single successful report emanates from a nest record from lowland Cheshire where a brood of 5 young were ringed. Historically the Group has recorded Ravens nesting in a variety of habitats including on tall man-made industrial structures, on power line pylons, on cliffs and in trees. Regrettably this is no longer the case and it is evident from casual observations that Ravens continue to be under-represented at the population level across the county.

Some intraguild conflict between Ravens and raptors occupying nests in the same sites has been recorded in the past. However this is typical of this species, which has a tendency to squabble with neighbours, and is of no concern.

### **Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least two monitoring studies or large representative study area.

Typically there were reports from several upland areas of 1 to 6 birds being present in the late winter and again through the autumn until year-end. However, once again there was no confirmation of breeding. Regrettably the Raven is a very scarce and very irregular breeder in the county despite there being ample suitable habitat.

From the evidence gathered over many years by the Group there is absolutely no doubt that Raven is a 'black hole' species in the Durham study area.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

Unfortunately one site failed at egg stage for the 4th year in succession. However, human interference is not thought to have played a part in the failure. The remaining 2 nests monitored, in Wigan town centre and a disused quarry, produced 3 and 6 young respectively.

A further territory was known to the Group but could not be monitored due to the hostile attitude of the owner. The increasing number of sightings reported annually suggests that there must be many undiscovered nests.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

The Raven population is given good coverage by the NRG throughout Northumberland, It is one of the first species you can '*get your teeth into*' at the start of a new breeding season. The Northumberland population has been stable at around 25-30 home ranges for a number of years and 2017 was no different with 22 home ranges occupied once again.

A total of 19 pairs built nests and of those 15 pairs collectively fledged in excess of 30 young. However, for the purpose of calculating the productivity data the number of young fledged has been restricted to 30.

As stated in the 2016 NERF Annual Report an initial examination of the population and breeding data in Northumberland looks encouraging. But is it really?

In the North Cheviots only 4 breeding pairs were recorded, in an area where you would expect a higher population. Interestingly in contrast the South Cheviots hold 7 breeding pairs in very similar habitat. Of those 7 pairs 2 breed on crags and the remaining 5 pairs nest in trees.

In the Border Forest 8 pairs nest on crags whilst only 3 nest in trees.

### **North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only.

**Level of monitoring:** Poor coverage; casual monitoring of a few pairs.

The history-making pair that nested successfully at Ravenscar in 2016 returned to the site early in the year. On one occasion 4 birds, which possibly included 2 of the young from 2016, were recorded together. Although in early March one bird was observed to take twigs into the nesting crevice the pair disappeared soon afterwards, which was puzzling as the birds did seem to be very protective of the nest site. Two observers witnessed one of the birds grabbing a Fulmar that was attempting to land nearby, by the neck and shaking it as a terrier does a rat! It is possible this pair may have moved along the coastline to another nest site that remained undetected.

Elsewhere, 2 birds together were observed on Rosedale Moor; a very heavily kept commercial grouse moor on 7th July. There were no further observations of these birds and their fate is unknown.

### **Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

Raven, in common with other large raptor species, appears to be seriously under-represented as a breeding species in the PDRMG study area. Three successful nests were recorded fledging 9 young.

### **South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland & part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

The SPRSG recording area contains a healthy population of breeding Ravens, with most of the White Peak quarries and those in north-east Derbyshire having successful breeding pairs each with broods of 3 or 4 young.

In the south of the recording area, south of Carsington Water, 23 tree nests were located, all of which were successful, but the brood numbers were not always ascertained. Seven pairs nested in Scots Pine, 6 in Corsican Pine, 3 in Cedar, 2 in Oak, 2 in Wellingtonia, one in Larch, one in Norway Spruce and one in Sycamore.

**N.B.** The statistics shown in the table only reflect the partial data that were collected by the Group. Whilst the actual total number of young fledging from the study area is not known it is not unreasonable to assume that the 23 successful nests each fledged broods of 3 or 4 young. If that were the case it would indicate that between 69 and 92 birds entered the South Peak population during 2017.

### **Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Part upland and part lowland areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

The Raven records shown in the table are the results of survey work conducted by independent observers, (for which we are grateful), National Park volunteers and the data has been co-ordinated by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.

Overall 2017 was an average year for Raven across the Yorkshire Dales.

### **NERF regional summary**

Raptor workers in the NERF study areas have long known that Raven populations have been suppressed year upon year in the northern uplands. Examination of the summary table reveals the true picture. Of the 53 young fledging in 2017 two regions, the South Peak and Northumberland, were responsible for producing 38 [71.7%]. When the 7 fledglings from the Yorkshire Dales are added to those 2 areas we can see that just 3 of the NERF RSGs produced 45 of the 53 young with the remaining 7 Groups averaging only one chick each. Where Ravens breed successfully the productivity is within the statistical norms, an indication that it is not habitat or prey availability that is the cause of the variations. There are no doubt fringe issues that cause these population differences between the productive and non-productive study areas, however the main driver appears to be related to land use. That leaves us with the question: if lack of suitable habitat and lack of prey are not the causes, what are? The uplands across the Pennines, the North York Moors and the Forest of Bowland are dominated by grouse moors and it is impossible not to come to the conclusion that Raven populations, along with those of raptors and owls, are being systematically suppressed by persecution.

The NERF 9-year Raven data shown in the table below brings the issue into sharp focus once again. During this period NERF has recorded a total of 1047 fledglings, an average of 116.33 per year. Ravens are long-lived birds and yet the breeding population is static, both geographically and numerically. Where are these chicks going? There is no doubt that some birds, both young and old, die naturally. There is no doubt that some are 'moved on' to prevent them from breeding and there is also no doubt that some are killed illegally.

Year	Home ranges checked	Home ranges occupied (pairs)	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored thru' season	Known pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
2009	84	68	0	11	51	39	39	37	105	2.69	2.06
2010	111	85	0	6	49	43	40	39	122	2.84	2.49
2011	111	82	1	5	52	47	46	44	138	2.94	2.65
2012	91	65	1	4	51	50	50	46	132	2.64	2.59
2013	145	87	0	17	78	72	68	44	116	1.61	1.49
2014	96	62	1	19	50	41	35	34	97	2.36	1.94
2015	124	92	3	16	73	59	57	54	109	1.85	1.49
2016	153	95	3	17	55	52	45	45	144	2.77	2.62
2017	129	90	3	5	60	57	55	53	84	1.47	1.40
Totals	1044	726	12	99	519	460	435	396	1047	2.28	2.02
<b>Av. / year</b>	<b>116.00</b>	<b>80.67</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>11.11</b>	<b>57.67</b>	<b>51.11</b>	<b>48.33</b>	<b>44.00</b>	<b>116.33</b>	<b>2.28</b>	<b>2.02</b>

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## RARER SPECIES MONITORED BY NERF

### Occurrences in 2017

2017 was the first year in NERF's existence when all its target species were recorded, and as a bonus, Pallid Harrier was recorded in 2 groups' areas! It is appropriate, therefore, to chronicle these events, as it might be several years before it happens again.

#### Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*



Following the discovery of moulted feathers, droppings and the remains of a kill in March 2016 in the Border Forest, Martin Davison, Ornithologist for the Forestry Commission and Northumbria RG, reported the following sighting:

#### **Kielder Burn and Kielder Forest, 25th March 2017**

In March, over the last twenty years, I have been leading walks in Kielder Forest for the Forestry Commission to watch out for displaying Goshawks, along with the more common birds of prey living in the forest.

These have been very popular with many birdwatchers getting their first view of a Goshawk. The 25th March was near perfect weather-wise. A frosty start was followed by a lovely day, warm even hot at times, broken blue sky and light wind. This year's group, 19 people in all, had already had a good morning with 3 sightings of displaying Goshawk pair, with 5 pairs of Buzzard for comparison, and a nice male Sparrowhawk.

At 12.30 pm we had a nice group of raptors displaying over a hillside, with one pair of Buzzards close by going through a great dive with much calling and legs hanging down. One of the group then pointed out that there were now 3 birds displaying but by this time the rest had been having another view of a Goshawk. Turning back to the Buzzard, I (as calmly as I could), pointed out that the 3rd bird in the trio was in fact a Golden Eagle!

As you could imagine it was exciting for everyone, and a new bird for some of the group. By now the eagle, a sub-adult male, was being mobbed by the Buzzard pair. It slowly lifted out over the trees, giving everyone a great view with its golden mantle glinting in the sunshine, and continued to climb till we lost it going over the hill.

*Footnote:* As the group met in the car park before the walk a lady had asked me “ Is there a chance of an eagle today”, I replied that I had never seen an eagle on any of the previous walks, but you never know!

*Editor’s Note:* Golden Eagles last bred in the Kielder area in 2001. Since then, Martin has seen eagles on 3 occasions, a 1st year from the Scottish Borders staying for a week, and all historic nest sites have been checked. In August 2018, 3 juveniles were released in the Scottish Borders by SNH, so it is hoped these will find their way to the safety of Kielder.

### Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*



Until very recently Pallid Harrier was regarded as a scarce national rarity; for example by 2010 there had been just 29 records all-told for the UK. A major autumn influx in 2011, when a further 29 individuals were reported, and a spring and autumn influx of 17 individuals in 2016 have caused its national status to be re-assessed. In the northern uplands a juvenile seen on Big Moor, Froggatt, Derbyshire from 9th-12th September 2016 was a new addition to the county list.

Even against this background two memorable events of 2017 in our region still came as a great surprise. On 26th April a superb adult Pallid Harrier took up territory at Whitendale, Forest of Bowland and was seen displaying during its stay up to 14th May. It was seen nest-building (at least 2 nests) and food caching. Amazingly, a different adult male Pallid Harrier was present and sky-danced in the same area as the nesting Hen Harriers in south Lakeland between 27th April and late May.

Whilst in neither case was there evidence that the male Pallid Harrier had paired with a Hen Harrier, such hybridisation is known from Fenno-Scandinavian nests and these have produced viable offspring. There have been at least two birds in UK identified as Pallid x Hen hybrids (*British Birds* 110:573)

NERF will continue to report on spring or summer presence in the uplands as and when it occurs.

### Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*



The last successful breeding event in the NERF area was in 2014 when a pair bred on the Humber levels and fledged one young. Prior to that, a pair bred on the North York Moors in 2010 and fledged two of five chicks. Montagu's Harriers normally breed in cereal fields, but the success in 2010 is a strong indication that they can adapt to moorland habitats. Offspring from these areas may be habituated to moorland and return in subsequent years mirroring the habitat selection of Hen Harriers in northern England. Unfortunately, taking into account the high persecution levels experienced by Hen Harriers this may be a blessing in disguise and may threaten northern populations rather than enhance them. This perception of persecution may have already presented itself in the North York Moors in 2011 after early pairing was followed by the male's absence thereafter. To counter the threats from egg collectors and excessive disturbance it is essential that the location of future breeding attempts is kept confidential and nest protection is activated where required and practically possible. The data for 2017 consisted of only one sighting, that of a 2nd calendar-year male near Goathland hunting a bracken bank on 3rd August. It was not seen subsequently, giving the overall impression that the species was not resident within the NERF area over the breeding season.

### White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*



An adult bird was recorded from the Wykeham Raptor viewpoint in the North York Moors on 15th March: it was later recorded at Bransholm, Hull. Presumably it was the same bird recorded at Creake, Norfolk on 17th March.

This was only the second sighting of this species since the inception of NERF, following an immature over Pock Stones Moor, Washburn Valley (YD&NRSG area) 10th April 2010.

### Rough-legged Buzzard *Pernis lagopus*



Although there were several reports of coastal migrants in East and North Yorkshire, particularly in the late winter period, only 2 birds were noted inland; one at Blanchland in Northumberland on 6th January 2017, and the other on Stony Marl Moor on the eastern edge of the North York Moors, on 24th November 2017. Singles were noted on the Durham coast on single dates in April and October.

Rough-legged Buzzards are infrequent winter visitors and passage migrants. 2014 was the last year when an influx was recorded, but there has never been any suggestion of breeding.

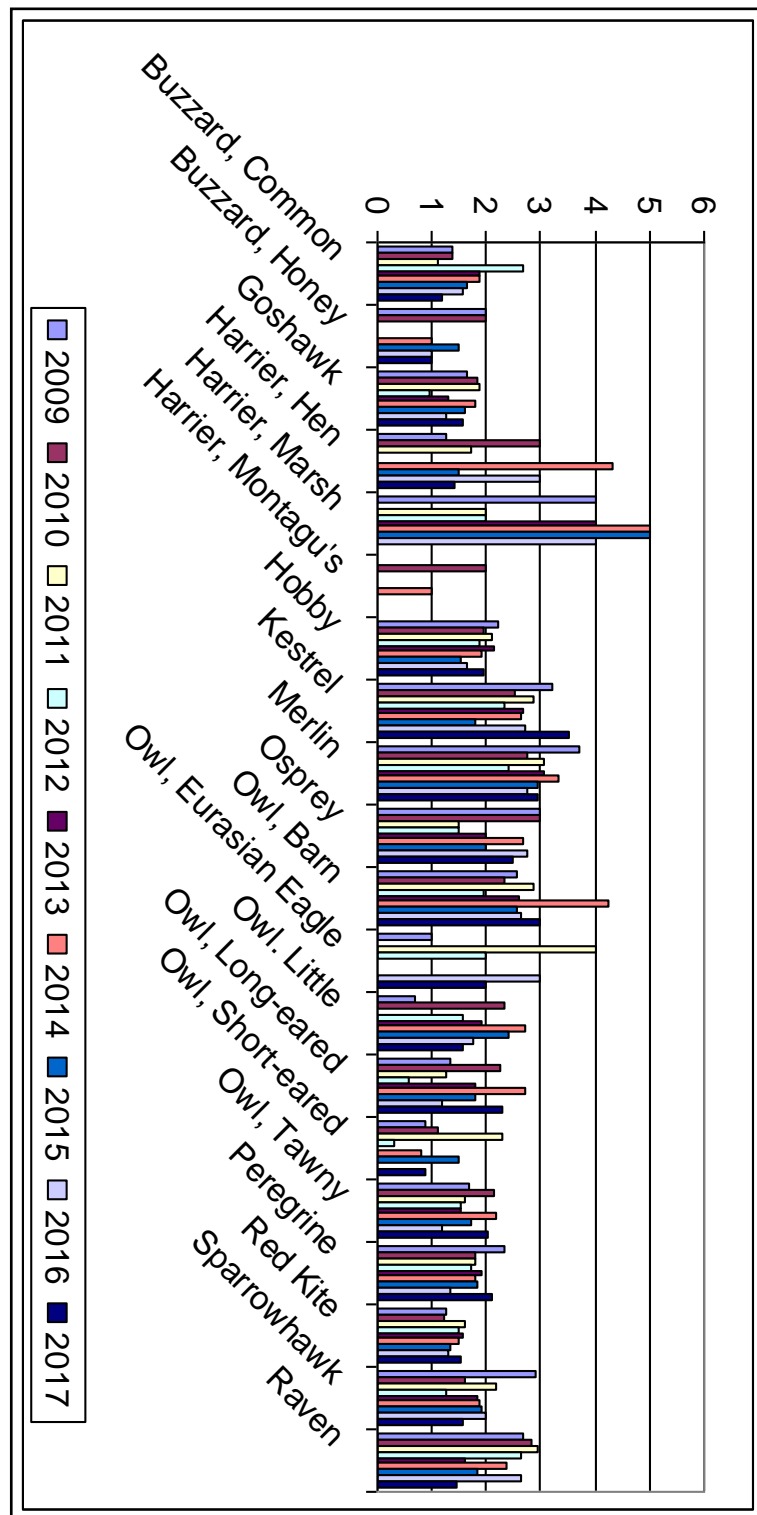
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## Appendix 1: Combined NERF data

Species	Home ranges checked	Home ranges occupied (pairs)	Home ranges occupied (singles)	Pairs failing/non-breeding	Territorial pairs monitored	Pairs laying eggs	Pairs hatching eggs	Pairs fledging young	Number fledged	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per pair monitored
Osprey	4	4	0	0	4	4	4	4	10	2.50	2.50
Honey-buzzard	10	1	7	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	1.00
Sparrowhawk	84	45	0	3	38	36	29	28	56	1.56	1.47
Goshawk	104	68	9	10	58	47	40	39	73	1.55	1.26
Marsh Harrier	3	2	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
Hen Harrier	67	7	9	0	7	7	4	3	10	1.43	1.43
Red Kite	51	28	9	3	18	17	17	17	26	1.53	1.44
Buzzard	247	240	6	13	128	123	114	114	146	1.19	1.14
Barn Owl	2255	436	33	10	433	430	423	422	1290	3.00	2.98
Tawny Owl	478	240	0	11	226	217	213	211	438	2.02	1.94
Little Owl	80	27	1	0	18	18	16	16	28	1.56	1.56
Long-eared Owl	55	36	0	0	32	29	24	24	24	0.83	0.75
Short-eared Owl	86	36	7	3	30	23	22	22	20	0.87	0.67
Eagle Owl	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Kestrel	111	91	0	6	71	70	68	67	245	3.50	3.45
Merlin	264	110	5	4	108	95	84	80	279	2.94	2.58
Hobby	70	60	3	6	50	46	46	46	89	1.93	1.78
Peregrine	178	95	5	26	76	56	50	47	117	2.09	1.54
Raven	129	90	3	5	60	57	55	53	84	1.47	1.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4274</b>	<b>1613</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1357</b>	<b>1275</b>	<b>1208</b>	<b>1191</b>	<b>2928</b>		

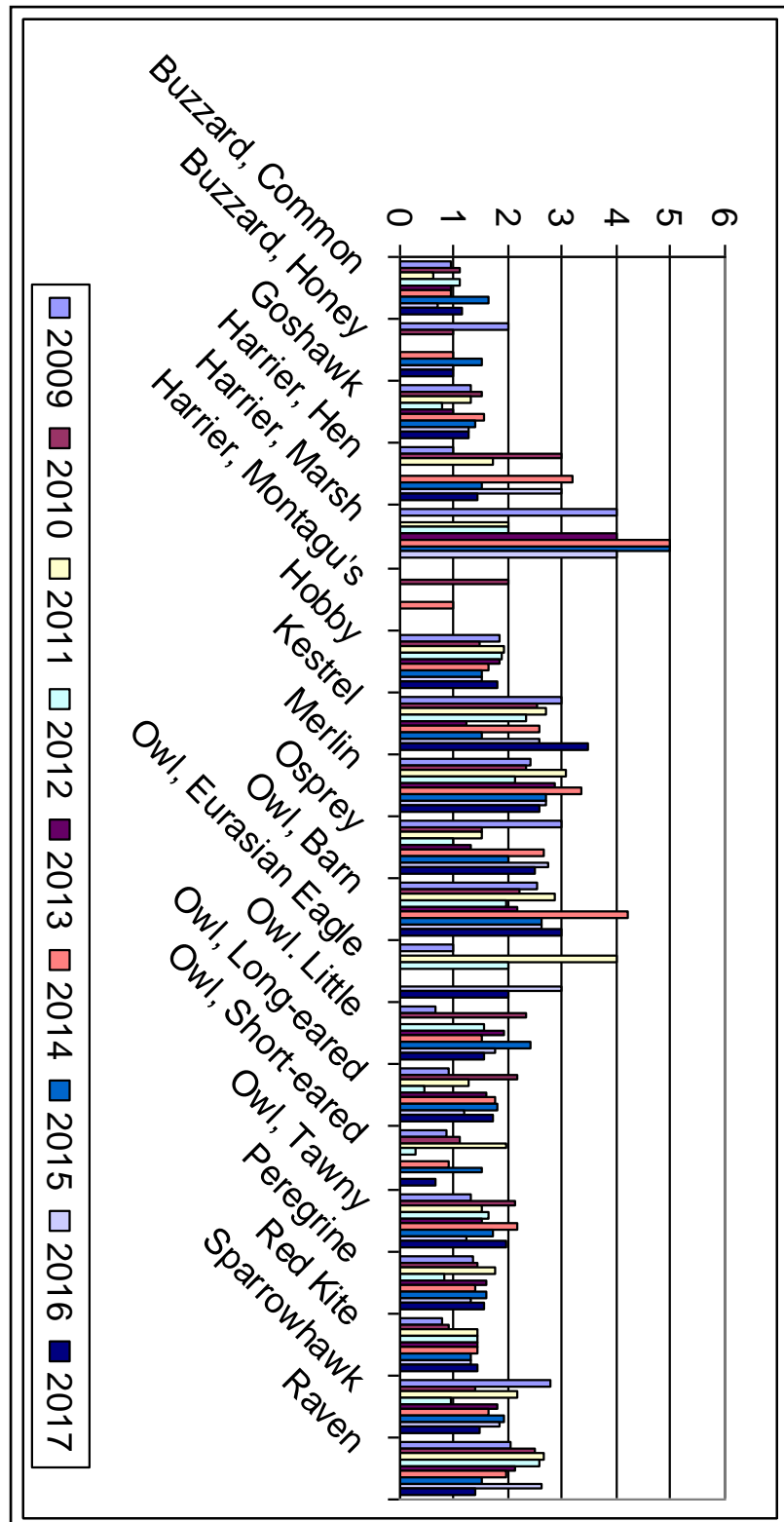
## Appendix 2: Combined productivity graphs

### a) young fledged per pair laying 2009-2017



## Appendix 2: Combined productivity graphs

### b) young fledged per territorial pair monitored 2009-2017



## Appendix 3: Ring recoveries and colour ring sightings

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Age	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
MRG	Barn Owl	GV43473	23/07/16	Haigh, Wigan	19/05/17	Grimeford, Lancs	300 days	5km	SW	Road casualty
MRG	Barn Owl	GV43463	05/07/16	Affetside, Bury	02/06/17	Stourton, Leeds	332 days	60km	ENE	Dead in chimney flue
MRG	Barn Owl	GR26873	27/06/11	Hilton House, Bolton	10/02/17	Standish, Wigan	5yrs 7 months	7km	NW	Dead at breeding site
NRG	Barn Owl	GR81278	07/06/14	Rennington, Northumberland	22/06/17	Alnwick, Northumberland	3 yrs	6km	S	Injured
NRG	Barn Owl	GR95205	01/06/16	West Kirknewton, Northumberland	31/05/17	Doddington Bridge, Northumberland	11 mths	9km	S	Control (female)
NRG	Barn Owl	GR95212	07/07/16	West Kirknewton, Northumberland	08/12/17	Mindrum, Northumberland	1 yr 5 mnths	6km	W	Dead
NRG	Barn Owl	GV18543	15/06/17	Roddam, Alnwick, Northumberland	20/11/17	Calder, Northumberland	5 mnths	n/a	n/a	Control (female)
NRG	Barn Owl	GV18610	27/07/15	Harwood Forest, Northumberland	27/03/17	Coldrife, Fontburn Resr	1 yr 8 mnths	8km	E	Dead in box
NRG	Barn Owl	GV18741	08/06/17	Old Hazelton Rigg, Northumberland	01/02/18	Longframlington, Northumberland	8 mnths	25km	SE	Injured
NRG	Barn Owl	GV38462	31/05/17	Red Row, Northumberland	25/02/2018	Rosedon, West Lilburn	9 mnths	n/a	n/a	Dead, hit window
NRG	Barn Owl	GV38463	31/05/17	Red Row, Northumberland	12/12/17	Kingston Deverill, Wiltshire	7 mnths	462km	S	Injured
NRG	Barn Owl	GV67002	25/06/17	High Spen, Gateshead	10/03/18	Chopwell Woods, Gateshead	9 mnths	3km	S	Dead
NRG	Barn Owl	GV67122	14/09/17	Howick, Northumberland	09/11/17	Rennington, Northumberland	2 mnths	7km	W	Road casualty
NYMUBSG	Barn Owl	GC82492	10/07/14	Guisborough	14/03/17	Guisborough	2yrs 8mnths	5km	ESE	Injured, destroyed
NYMUBSG	Barn Owl	GV00691	07/09/17	Ainthorpe, N Yorkshire	21/10/17	Danby, Whitby	44 days	0km	N	Dead, violent weather
NYMUBSG	Barn Owl	GV00672	03/07/17	Danby Dale, N Yorkshire	03/12/17	Lockwood Beck Reservoir	153 days	6km	N	Road casualty
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GR46835	04/07/12	Greasley, Notts	08/05/17	Hardwick Hall, Derbys	4 yrs 308 days	16km	N	Control (female)
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GR31567	31/08/12	Staveley, Derbys	04/07/17	Disley, Cheshire	4 yrs 307 days	48km	WNW	Control



Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Age	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GC43756	19/09/12	Near Sheffield	30/01/17	Rotherham	4 yrs 135 days	7km	NE	Long dead, possibly shot
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV25016	13/06/16	Letwell, S Yorkshire	23/02/17	Worksop, Notts	255 days	8km	S	Dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV25365	15/06/16	Rough Wood, Derbys	09/08/17	Hathersage, Derbys	1 yr 2 mnths	5km	N	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV25028	23/09/16	Slade Hooton, S Yorkshire	22/06/17	Hardwick Wood, S Yorkshire	272 days	6km	SW	Control
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GC20738	13/06/17	Handley, Derbys	11/11/17	Gratton, Bakewell, Derbys	151 days	15km	NW	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Little Owl	EN50906	27/05/11	Pilsley, Derbys	02/05/17	Pilsley, Derbys	5yrs 340 days	0km		Control
NRG	Tawny Owl	GR34963	05/05/17	Kielder Forest	03/03/18	Wark, Hexham, Northumberland	10 mnths	26km	SE	Dead
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC07022	17/04/07	Armathwaite, Cumbria	24/04/17	High Stand, Cumbria	10 yrs	5km	NW	Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC07023	17/04/07	Armathwaite, Cumbria	24/04/17	High Stand, Cumbria	10 yrs	5km	NW	Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC09270	23/04/07	Lawson Park, Cumbria	26/04/17	Grizedale, Cumbria	10 yrs	3km	SE	Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC09275	24/04/07	Satterthwaite, Cumbria	26/04/17	Grizedale, Cumbria	10 yrs	4km	NW	Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC09295	24/04/07	Satterthwaite, Cumbria	20/04/17	Grizedale, Cumbria	10 yrs	4km	NW	Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC09306	30/04/08	Satterthwaite, Cumbria	10/05/17	Grizedale, Cumbria	9 yrs	2km	S	Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GF07476	08/05/96	Grizedale, Cumbria	19/05/17	Grizedale, Cumbria	21 yrs	0km		Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GR57902	17/05/12	Whinlatter, Cumbria	24/04/17	High Stand, Cumbria	5 yrs	37km	NE	Control (female)
NRG	Tawny Owl	GR81496	19/05/15	Slaley Forest, Northumberland	24/02/17	Horsforth, W Yorkshire	2 yrs	119km	SE	Dead on railway
NRG	Tawny Owl	GN00977	14/05/04	Gibside Hall, Derwent Valley	13/05/17	Gibside Hall, Derwent Valley	13 yrs	0km		Control (female)
NYMUBSG	Tawny Owl	GN29818	16/05/03	Grosmont, N Yorkshire	06/06/17	Egton Bridge near Whitby	14 yrs	3km	W	Dead

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Age	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
NRG	Kestrel	ET65458	21/06/10	Washington SW, Tyne & Wear	14/06/17	Penshaw, Tyne & Wear	7 yrs	2km	E	Control (female)
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EY03738	23/06/12	Thorpe Salvin, S Yorkshire	03/07/17	Chesterfield, Derbys	5 yrs 10 days	18km	SW	Road casualty now released
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EY19891	09/06/14	Oakerthorpe, Derbys	11/11/17	Stonebroom, Derbys	3 yrs 155 days	5km	NE	Drowned in water butt
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EY19824	09/06/14	Oakerthorpe, Derbys	19/09/15	Higham, Derbys	1 yr, 102 days	4km	E	Road casualty
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EZ54079	09/06/17	Ulley Beeches, S Yorkshire	26/08/17	Near Ulley, S Yorkshire	78 days	0km		Dead at site of wind turbine
BRSBG	Merlin	DE49158	01/07/17	Near Slaidburn	18/04/18	Blois, Loir-et-Cher, FRANCE	291 days	n/a	S	Died of starvation 2 days after being found
NYMUBSG	Merlin	ED23021	04/07/16	Westerdale Moor, N Yorkshire	05/04/17	Parkgate, Wirral	275 days	186km	SW	Freshly dead
MRG	Peregrine	GV07218	03/06/15	Cheltenham	12/03/17	Trencherfield Mill, Wigan	1 yr 9mths	186km	N	Colour ring read in field
MRG	Peregrine	GV11588	09/06/15	CIS building Manchester	16/08/17	CIS building Manchester	n/a	0km		Long dead in flue there
MRG	Peregrine	Colour ring PK GV11680	03/06/15	Near Burnley	May 2017	Near Rochdale	2 yrs	16km	S	Breeding, ring read in field
MRG	Peregrine	GV25827	14/07/15	Near Rochdale	24/12/15	Peasley Cross, St Helens	5 mths 10 days	46km	WSW	Freshly dead
MRG	Peregrine	GN12154	2003	Chichester Cathedral	2006 to date	Central Manchester	15 yrs+	320km	S	Metal ring read in field from photos
MRG	Peregrine	Colour ring TJ	2016 (f)	Confidential site, Shropshire	April 2018	Near Bury	2 yrs	n/a	N	Re-pair after sitting female shot
SPRSG & PDRMG	Peregrine	GF88390	17/07/04	Confidential site, Derbyshire	15/04/17	Retford, Notts	12 yrs 272 days	68km	E	Ring only found
SPRSG & PDRMG	Peregrine	GV25294	27/05/17	Wakefield Cathedral	20/07/17	Swillington Ings, W Yorkshire	54 days	11km	S	Ring read in field
SPRSG & PDRMG	Peregrine	GV25294	27/05/17	Wakefield Cathedral	17/12/2017	Old Moor RSPB, S Yorkshire	204 days	19km	S	Ring read in field
MRG	Raven	HT71829	04/04/13	Horwich, Bolton	17/05/16	Hoghton, Lancs	3 yrs 1 mth, 13 days	16km	NNW	Long dead