

Northern England Raptor Forum



Annual Review 2019

Acknowledgements

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We would like to express our thanks to all the individuals who allowed us to use their photographs, and to Mark Eaton and the RBBP for allowing data in press to be used in advance of publication. Wilf Norman again proof-read the Review and made many helpful suggestions.

Northern England Raptor Forum

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North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

South Peak Raptor Study Group

General enquiries should be made to:

Northern England Raptor Forum, c/o 25 Pinewood Crescent, Heighington, Co Durham, DL5 6RR

Website: www.raptorforum.co.uk



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Northern England Raptor Forum

Annual Review 2019



Speaking for Birds of Prey with One Voice

Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Useful telephone numbers	5
Foreword	6
Chairman's Report	7
Secretary's Report	14
Geographical coverage	17
NERF 2019 Annual Review	18
Species monitoring	18
Persecution and Black Hole species	20
Summary	21
Combined statistics	22
Species Reports	
Editor's Note	23
Buzzard, Common <i>Buteo buteo</i>	57
Goshawk, Northern <i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	34
Harrier, Hen <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	44
Harrier, Marsh <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	39
Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo</i>	94
Honey-buzzard <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	28
Kestrel, Common <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	84
Kite, Red <i>Milvus milvus</i>	50
Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>	88
Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	24
Owl, Barn <i>Tyto alba</i>	61
Owl, Eurasian Eagle <i>Bubo bubo</i>	65
Owl, Little <i>Athene noctua</i>	72
Owl, Long-eared <i>Asio otus</i>	75
Owl, Short-eared <i>Asio flammeus</i>	79
Owl, Tawny <i>Strix aluco</i>	68
Peregrine <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	99
Raven, Common <i>Corvus corax</i>	105
Sparrowhawk, Eurasian <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	31
Summary of Raptor Monitoring in Shropshire	111
Summary of Raptor Monitoring in the Washburn Valley	114
Rarer species monitored by NERF in 2019	117
Appendices	
1. Combined NERF monitoring data	119
2. Combined productivity graphs	120
3. Ring recoveries	122
NERF Group contacts	127

Photographs:

Front cover – Barn Owls at the eclipse of the moon, January 21st 2019 (Gordon Yates)

All other photographs - Acknowledgements are given with the photo.

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

Greater Manchester Police 0161 872 5050 (General Enquiries).

Humberside Police 0845 125 3545

Lancashire Constabulary 0845 125 3545

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.

Hen Harrier sightings: RSPB hotline 0845 4600121 or henharriers@rspb.org.uk

Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (Natural England) 0800 321600

CEH Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme 01524 595830

WARNING: dealing with raptors which might have been poisoned

Some poisons are exceptionally toxic and can be absorbed directly through the skin. Raptor Workers finding a raptor 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. However standard, thin, household gloves are not effective against many of the poisons found 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.

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 or the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme [WIIS] telephone 0800 321600.

The information should also be passed on to the RSPB Investigations Team telephone 01767 680551 or email crime@rspb.org.uk. For confidential reports of raptor persecution call 0300 999 0101.

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

All information and telephone numbers correct at September 2019.

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

Thanks to Yorkshire Red Kites who compiled the original version of the above warning.



Foreword

Liz Ballard, Chief Executive, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust

I feel very privileged to have been asked to write this year's Foreword for the 2019 NERF Annual Review. Of course, I am writing this in the autumn of 2020, as we look back to a spring and summer in lockdown and forward to a possible second peak of Covid 19.

But if nothing else, this strange year has reminded many of us of the beauty and wonder of the natural world, the joy it gives us and how reliant and interconnected we are with it. And birds of prey are very much part of that story, often bringing 'awe and wonder' to those fortunate enough to see them overhead.

Often people have their favourite bird of prey - mine is the Goshawk. Usually this favouritism goes back to some memory, some experience of first 'meeting' such a bird, or having some incredible and unexpected insight into their private world. A moment when we become part of *their* world rather than them being part of ours. And the work of the raptor monitoring groups gives us more insight in to their private world.

The data and stories that are collated together here in this report provide a brief glimpse in to the lives of our northern raptors: where they nest, where they hunt, how well they breed, how their offspring have survived and inevitably how they die. This monitoring, often involving hours of dedication in remote and wild locations, is so vital to improve our understanding of these birds and how we impact on their long-term survival – no, not just their survival – but their ability to thrive.

Inevitably this leads me to refer to the darker stories that these data tells. The loss of birds, not to natural causes, but to habitat loss, intensive management, poisoning, trapping, shooting, egg theft and disturbance. Using monitoring data and satellite tag analysis, Murgatroyd *et al.* in Nature Communication, (<http://go.nature.com/2JuoRfo>) found that 72% of 58 tagged hen harriers in the study were confirmed or thought likely to have been killed illegally. This shows how critical monitoring is to help us understand what is happening in our natural world and what we need to do to reverse these declines.

So now is the time to turn this data around. It's time to consign illegal wildlife persecution to the past, alongside slavery and no votes for women. We need everyone: police, the public, gamekeepers, conservationists, estates and...you... to stand up for these birds with better, tighter legislation, stronger penalties and zero tolerance for law breakers. And, if grouse shooting continues to be part of that picture, then license it or ban it. But let's just get on with it. Look at the data and protect these special birds.

Chairman's Report: September 2019 - September 2020



Welcome to the eleventh Northern England Raptor Forum's Annual Review. The previous 10 Annual Reviews have all been printed and provided in the traditional hard copy format. I am sure that those of you who are fortunate to possess one, more or perhaps all of the Annual Reviews from 2009 to 2018 will agree with me that they were superbly produced and informative documents containing very valuable datasets. All of the previous reports are available on line and can be accessed by visiting raptorforum.wordpress.com

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives in many, unpredictable ways and on behalf of the NERF family I would like to express our condolences to our supporters who have lost loved ones during these very difficult times.

One consequence of Covid-19 is that the NERF Management Team, in consultation with the South Peak and Dark Peak Raptor Study Groups, decided that because many of our members and supporters are in the 'at risk' demographic it would be irresponsible to increase their health risks if we were to hold our traditional annual conference in November. The NERF Conference is not just about listening to excellent presentations it is an opportunity to meet our peers to discuss matters of common interest face to face; something that would have been impossible whilst complying with the current physical distancing guidelines. The conference has been rescheduled to November 2021 and we look forward to seeing you there; further details will be announced at the appropriate time.

As those of you who have attended the annual conference previously will know, part of the delegate fee included a copy of the Annual Review of the previous year and it had been our intention to follow the same procedure and publish this, the 2019 Annual Review, at the 2020 Conference. As a consequence of cancelling the 2020 Conference we have lost the main vehicle for recovering the very substantial printing costs. Taking all of this into account we have decided to break with tradition and produce the 2019 Annual Review in an online version only. Naturally we will maintain the exceptionally high standards of previous issues. Whether we revert to printing hard copies of future Annual Reviews will be considered at the next management meeting which will be held when we are able to convene in complete safety. In the meantime I hope that you enjoy reading this NERF Review in the virtual world. Before moving on I wish to offer my heartfelt thanks to the species editors for combining data from the member Groups into a concise report for each species, to Judith Smith and Wilf Norman for pulling this final document together and to the photographers who have kindly allowed us to use their images.

Another major change for NERF in 2019 was, after a decade, the adoption of a new, very modern, stylised logo. Branding and image are perhaps an anathema for many fieldworkers but in the modern era it is essential that NERF projects its philosophies and ethics in a positive manner and with that responsibility comes the requirement for the organisation to be instantly recognisable.

As you may imagine, reaching a final decision was not an easy process. As with all collaborations, where personal opinion and taste is involved, compromise is the only way

forward. Starting with a large number of variants to choose from there were times when the process reminded me of Sir Alec Issigonis, designer of the original Mini in 1959, when he said “a camel is a horse designed by a committee”! Fortunately we have Paul Galloway, a graphic designer, in our ranks and with the patience of Job he persevered with what appeared at the time to be endless suggestions and produced a series of new variations. In the end Paul’s skill and professional foresight won through and after a final vote we now have an excellent, expressive and modern logo to take us through our second decade of *‘speaking for birds of prey with one voice’*.

In November Cheshire RSG hosted the NERF Annual Conference in Chester University. The conference was excellent and testament to the commitment of our colleagues in the Cheshire RSG. Not only is the conference a welcome opportunity to absorb fascinating new information, it also offers a rare opportunity for Raptor Workers to meet together and exchange experiences and ideas during the breaks. Following a conversation with Leo Smith, Shropshire RSG, who delivered a presentation on the Red Kites of Shropshire to the conference, Leo agreed that it would benefit both Shropshire RSG and the NERF family if they became an adviser.

The negative issues that face our birds of prey in the North of England are replicated throughout England and I have long held the view that Raptor Study Groups working in discrete geographical areas should form collaborative organisations using the NERF model. The second stage, after a number of ‘NERF style’ organisations have been created, would be for the various organisations to form an all-England Raptor Forum, similar to the Scottish Raptor Study Group. There is no doubt that the Scottish RSG model is very effective in highlighting the issues that affect raptors. This effectiveness is perhaps best demonstrated by the SRSG’s access to MSPs and their ability to present evidence directly to Parliamentary Select Committees. Only time will tell whether or not the SRSG model can be / will be followed in England.

Whilst the conference was a great success delegates were saddened to hear that Dr Cathleen Thomas, RSPB Senior Project Manager of the Hen Harrier Life Plus Project, had been involved in a motorway accident on route to the conference the previous evening. She had been stationary in a line of traffic when a vehicle crashed into her from the rear. The collision was so powerful that both cars were locked together and they had to be written off. Fortunately the airbag in Cathleen’s vehicle activated and this undoubtedly saved her from serious injury. However, due to the whiplash injury that she did sustain and the onset of delayed shock she was too unwell to make her planned presentation to the conference. Many NERF members had worked closely with Cathleen for several years, getting to know her not just as a colleague but as a friend. It was typical of Cathleen that, despite her injuries, she found the strength to attend the last session of the conference because she believed that she had a duty to apologise in person for not making her presentation to the delegates. In recognition of her outstanding contribution to protecting and promoting the plight of Hen Harriers throughout the UK NERF was delighted to award her a well-deserved Certificate of Merit.

For the second successive year NERF supported Operation Owl, the national Police initiative developed by North Yorkshire Police and designed to highlight the prevalence of raptor persecution that continues to blight the UK. The North York Moors Upland Bird Study Group hosted NERF’s contribution to Operation Owl in Goathland, in the heart of the county with the persistent, unenviable reputation of being the region with the highest level of raptor

persecution in the country. In contrast to the previous event, hosted by NERF, it was decided that rather than a series of presentations it would follow a public ‘walk-in’ format, which would allow attendees to absorb the issues at their own pace. Unfortunately for several days before the event was to be held the Met Office were warning of a severe weather event in the area and were advising against all but essential travel. Whilst the dire predictions of torrential rain failed to materialise it was clear that the public heeded the weather warning and consequently visitor numbers to Goathland on the day were significantly below normal levels. With fewer visitors to the village, renowned for its connection to the TV Police series ‘Heartbeat’ and the North York Moors Steam Railway, this understandably impacted the footfall at the Operation Owl event. Whilst there was initial disappointment at the number of visitors to our event this was in fact a blessing in disguise. With fewer visitors than expected the ones that did attend had more time to read the information boards and the exhibitors were able to hold in-depth conversations with people who had no prior knowledge of how widespread and pernicious raptor persecution is in the North of England or how it is largely linked to the management of land used for game shooting.

It will come as no surprise to readers of this Annual Review that raptor persecution continued apace during 2019. There were too many to review here, however, there are a number of cases which deserve to be re-visited.

A Hen Harrier named Ada that hatched in the Kielder Forest, just over the border in Scotland, was initially ringed and later satellite tagged by members of NERF as part of the RSPB Hen Harrier Life Project. Ada’s tag was working perfectly until it catastrophically failed, also known as, ‘stopped no malfunction’, on a grouse moor at Allenheads, Weardale, in Northumberland. A search of the area by very experienced RSPB staff, using sophisticated technical equipment, failed to locate the bird.

Next came River, a Hen Harrier that hatched on United Utilities land in the Forest of Bowland which is managed as a reserve by RSPB. NERF members were, once again, involved with monitoring, ringing and satellite tagging River who lasted just half a year before its life was ended on a grouse moor in the North of England. It is difficult to know what's worse, the loss of yet another young Hen Harrier or the fact that we were not surprised when the RSPB announced the fact that River's satellite tag had inexplicably stopped working on a Yorkshire grouse moor, an area with a long history of raptor persecution.

Little did we know when the article about River was written that the satellite tag fitted to Vulcan, another of the 2018 cohort, had already suddenly and inexplicably stopped transmitting, six days previously. Vulcan, one of five chicks from Northumberland, drifted south through the Peak District to Hampshire, spent time in Dorset before the tag finally sent out the last transmission from farmland, managed for pheasant and partridge shooting south of Calston Wellington, North Wiltshire.

Regrettably Wiltshire is no stranger to controversy where Hen Harriers are concerned. This is the county where Natural England proposes to release circa 100 Hen Harrier chicks, sourced from the near Continent, over a 5-year period, as part of their southern reintroduction scheme. Natural England has always proclaimed that the area is a safe haven for reintroducing Hen Harriers – an essential condition for such reintroduction programmes, yet this new evidence reinforces the fact that it is not a safe place to release Hen Harriers. The fact that Vulcan has inexplicably ‘*disappeared*’ in an area approximately 20 kilometres to the north of the

proposed release site is of great concern to our members. NERF opposes the reintroduction scheme, which we believe should be abandoned.

Of course it was not just Hen Harriers that were persecuted during 2019. In March a member of the public found a dead Red Kite below a tree in Blazefield, adjacent to a caravan site, on the outskirts of Pateley Bridge, North Yorkshire. Regrettably the report of a dead bird of prey illegally killed in the county, is not ground-breaking news. It is just another tragic case of bird of prey persecution in North Yorkshire; the heart of raptor persecution in England. Whilst this latest killing is a shocking incident, few people who monitor the all too regular events such as this will have been surprised by it. A forensic examination undertaken by scientists working for the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme [WIIS] revealed that the bird had been killed with the highly toxic poisons bendiocarb and isofenphos, both of which are banned in the UK. These are the poisons of choice for anyone wishing to kill birds of prey. Red Kites are scavengers and carrion forms a large part of their diet. They are unable to defend prey against bigger raptors such as Buzzards and invariably take it to a tree before eating it. It is unlikely to have flown far before dying. The callous use of poisons to kill wildlife is indiscriminate and poses a threat to both pets and people in the vicinity.

The long history of bird of prey persecution in the Nidderdale ANOB has been documented by the RSPB Investigations Team. The data show that between 1987 and 2017 43 birds of prey were confirmed as victims of persecution. Of those 43 no less than 24 were Red Kites. The unacceptable situation in the Nidderdale ANOB was also highlighted in a report published by the ANOB Authority and can be downloaded at:

[BoP-in-NiddAONB-Evidence-Report-FINAL-Sept-2019.pdf](#)

In May a Peregrine Falcon was found dead at the foot of a pylon on the Elton Reservoir Local Nature Reserve, Bury by a local birdwatcher. When the body was recovered it was evident that it had been badly scavenged, however an x-ray organised by RSPCA Inspector Paul Heaton, a member of the NERF-affiliated Manchester Raptor Group, revealed that there was an air pellet or a bullet embedded in the body.

NERF takes the loss of Ada, River, Vulcan and all of the other '*disappeared*' Hen Harriers, tagged or not, and other protected birds of prey, personally and we are sick of it! Society is sick of it! Be under no illusion, the killing of raptors, particularly on land managed for game shooting, is not a random isolated act of brutality; it is a function of serious, organised crime pervading grouse moors across our uplands and pheasant and partridge shooting in the lowlands, often sustaining their profitability. Anyone with a modicum of humanity cannot avoid being emotionally affected by the never-ending pointless slaughter. It is not just an insult to Hen Harriers, or the people that commit their lives to protecting them, it is an insult to the very fabric of civilization.

Fuller accounts of these, and other raptor related crimes can be found on the NERF website at [raptorforum.wordpress.com](#)

The persecution of birds of prey is not limited to Northern England; there are parts of Scotland where the persistent killing of raptors is extensive. In light of this the Scottish Government commissioned research under the Chairmanship of Professor Alan Werritty. The remit of the Group was to – '*examine the environmental impact of grouse moor management practices such as muirburn, the use of medicated grit and mountain hare culls, and advise on the option of licensing grouse shooting businesses*'. Whilst the Werritty report only looked at

the situation in Scotland any changes to Scottish legislation are likely to have an impact on how land management and grouse shooting is regulated in England in the future. Consequently NERF is eagerly waiting for the long overdue report to be implemented.

Returning to Hen Harriers; one arm of Natural England's Hen Harrier Recovery Plan allegedly designed for increasing the number of Hen Harriers in England is 'brood management'. This scheme allows for the removal of eggs or chicks from a grouse moor if there is a second nest within 10 kilometres. In other words if there is a second nest anywhere with 314 km² then one is vulnerable to be brood managed. After the chicks have been reared in captivity they are to be returned to a similar habitat from where they were removed. If this was a genuine conservation project then NERF would support it. However, despite Natural England's assertions, this is not a conservation project. Brood management is simply a facility to placate criminal elements within the shooting industry in the naive hope that if the chicks are moved off the grouse moors during the breeding season then the killing will stop. It will not stop and NERF does not support the plan. In 2019 the circumstances which would trigger brood management materialised and five chicks were removed. Ironically this was in the same area where a satellite tagged Hen Harrier called Bowland Betty was found - killed, where Hen Harrier River was found - killed and where the RSPB filmed an armed man and dog in a Hen Harrier winter roost.

I have made licensed visits to around 50% of Hen Harrier nests in England in addition to several others in Wales and Scotland over the last 10 years and seen and handled in excess of 100 chicks. The photograph of the tiny 5 brood managed chicks standing on a towel was one of the most pathetic images that I have ever seen. They should have been in a wild nest, not paraded as part of a Natural England PR stunt. The 5 chicks, all fitted with satellite tags, were later released on a different grouse moor in the North of England. Four of the chicks are 'missing fate unknown' and the 5th is missing, presumed to be dead. The whole situation is a fiasco and the brood management plan should have been abandoned before it got underway. It wasn't. It should have been abandoned when the first brood-managed chicks went missing. It wasn't. Brood management has taken place again during 2020 when 9 chicks were removed from 2 nests in the North of England. One of the chicks did not survive the process and died before fledging. For the sake of the 8 remaining birds involved I hope that they survive the trials ahead of them although that is doubtful. Even when the chicks survive the rearing and release process and their early months of freedom they will be extremely vulnerable to being killed during the autumn and winter if they roost on or transit across grouse moors. This is not a prediction based on fantasy, it is a prediction based on Natural England data published by Murgatroyd *et al.* The full paper report can be read by following the link:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331965137_Patterns_of_satellite_tagged_hen_harrier_disappearances_suggest_widespread_illegal_killing_on_British_grouse_moors

Dr. Mark Avery and the RSPB launched a legal challenge to the brood management scheme at the end of 2018. Whilst the original court decision was that brood management was legal that decision was later successfully appealed and following a delay due to Covid-19 the case is due to be heard at the end of 2020.

On a more positive note the Friends of Red Kites [FoRK] secured funding to purchase satellite tags which were fitted to 2 chicks from the 2019 cohort. Our thanks go to Brian Etheridge who supervised the tag fitting. The scheme was supported by the RSPB Investigations Team who monitored the birds utilising the same system that is used for the

Hen Harrier chicks and we are grateful to Howard Jones for facilitating the monitoring process and providing regular location updates of the 2 birds. Unfortunately both of the Red Kite chicks have now been reported as having disappeared in suspicious circumstances within the same square mile inside the North Pennines AONB and just two months apart. The tags fitted to the birds are extremely reliable and continue to transmit even after the bird dies which makes finding them a relatively easy process. Despite extensive searches in both areas of the last known satellite transmissions, neither the bodies nor the tags have been recovered. This is highly unusual when we take into account the fact that historically the RSPB Investigations Team has found tags that had been fitted to birds that had been subsequently predated and only the tag and a pile of chewed feathers remained. At the time of writing Police investigations are continuing into their disappearance.

As the Covid-19 pandemic took hold the National Health Service was put under incredible stress and in an attempt to slow the rate of infection to manageable levels the Government introduced 'lockdown' and we were all told to stay at home and save lives. In line with the Government's stay at home policy the BTO suspended all nest monitoring and ringing activities; a policy that NERF supported. The impact of the lockdown on raptor studies will not be known until the 2020 data has been collated but it is likely that the largest effect will be observed with the early breeders such as Raven, Peregrine and Tawny Owl when monitoring was not allowed. As lockdown was gradually released Raptor Workers had to engage in catch-up spending even longer hours than usual in the field surveying for hard to locate species such as Hen Harriers, Short-eared Owls and Merlin. It will be interesting to see how successful we were when the data is analysed. There is one piece of data that we don't have to wait for. On 15th May the RSPB Investigations Team reported that they were 'overrun' by a surge in reports of birds of prey-related crimes. During the early part of lockdown the Team recorded 56 separate incidents, involving 7 species, the majority of which were on or close to shooting estates. Since that data was released there have been several other reports of raptor related crime and at times it appears to be never ending despite claims by the representatives of the shooting industry that they have a 'zero tolerance' of raptor persecution. It is self-evident that this self-proclaimed zero tolerance of persecution is not shared by some members of the industry that they represent. Whilst the Moorland Association, BASC, Countryside Alliance and the National Gamekeepers Organisation may be good at lobbying the Government, when it comes to maintaining the *status quo*, where they perceive that change would have a detrimental impact the industry it is clear that when it comes to preventing raptor persecution they are not fit for purpose. Defra and Natural England seem to be incapable of separating these two aspects of the shooting industry or they are wilfully blind to the criminality that pervades both upland and lowland shooting. It is long overdue that Defra and Natural England recognise the shooting representatives as lobby groups rather than delivery groups and treat them accordingly.

In early 2020 Natural England issued a licence permitting the removal of 6 Peregrine chicks from wild nests to be allegedly used to create a wild blood line that would be available in the event that the Peregrine population crashed as it had done in the 1950s when the widespread use of DDT had decimated the population. The whole application was based on a false premise that 6 birds would supply the required injection of new genes that would benefit the captive breeding programs for ever and would also lead to a reduction in the need to illegally take falcons from the wild. You don't have to be a geneticist to see the flaw in that argument. The more the licence application was scrutinised the more the scheme unravelled and it became clear that the actual intention was to create a breeding programme in its own right. That revelation didn't come as a surprise to anyone in the conservation world. Natural

England claimed that they were obliged to issue the licence, under Section 16 (1)(e) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 [WCA], which permits the removal of birds from the wild for falconry or aviculture. They went on to claim that failure to do so could leave them open to a legal challenge, which they would lose, on the basis that the removal of chicks is allowed for cultural reasons in both the WCA and the Birds Directive. The licensee had made a similar application to Scottish Natural Heritage and that application had been refused. Was Natural England being weak? If they believed that they would lose a legal challenge did they consider amending the legislation to remove that particular permitted activity and face the wrath of Europe? If they wanted to avoid that, did they consider kicking the problem in to the long grass for a few months until we were finally out of the EU and then changing the legislation? The whole situation is very unsatisfactory and whichever way you look at it Natural England did not cover itself in glory with this case. The licence remains valid for 2021 so we will have to wait and see how this sorry tale unfolds in future.

By the time this Annual Review is published we will only be a few weeks away from Brexit and all of the consequences of the decision to leave Europe, intended or otherwise. During the build up to the referendum Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, promised a '*green Brexit*', whatever that means. Prior to joining the EU the UK was described as '*the dirty man of Europe*'. All of the current environment protection that we have in the UK emanates from the EU, including the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive. It is essential that we remain vigilant over the months and years to come to ensure that our wildlife and environmental regulations and legislation are enhanced, not diluted. Only time will tell if the current Government can be trusted to deliver a greener UK. Unfortunately, to date the Government has proven to be less than trustworthy on a number of issues where trust is involved. Their latest assault on the Planning Regulations and the Judicial Review system are not positive indicators. We have become accustomed to successive Environment Ministers either dragging their feet or simply failing to '*do the right thing*' when progressive legislative changes have been suggested. What are you going to do in 2021, Secretary of State Eustice, improve our natural environment and protective legislation or backslide on your predecessor's promises?

Until we can all meet again, stay safe.

Steve Downing

*Chairman
Northern England Raptor Forum
September 2020*



Secretary's Report: September 2019- August 2020

The Northern England Raptor Forum was formed in 2006 and our very first published Annual Review covered the 2009 season. This then is our 11th consecutive review which demonstrates the unwavering commitment of member groups to extensively monitor and report on key raptor species in northern uplands. By collating the

results of these long running field studies we aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of the breeding status of raptors, owls and raven in the region. Crucially, the unique strength of our data is that it is solely evidence-based and can be used with confidence to help inform species and habitat conservation measures and to contribute hard facts to the debates surrounding species protection.

The core membership to NERF of ten raptor study groups, as described in this review, remains unaltered and we are pleased to now include, as appendices, additional contributions from the Shropshire RSG and the Washburn area of the Nidderdale AONB. These offer us a broader context to the trends in breeding success and it is notable just how consistent the picture is that emerges.

The past year has been dominated of course by the widespread concerns and constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic. Members met as usual for our autumn 2019 meeting and also at the 2019 Conference but since then our two scheduled formal meetings in 2020 and plans for a 2020 Conference have had to be cancelled. The decisions have been unavoidable but we have certainly missed the direct contact of friends and colleagues. Fortunately, we have been able to conduct business and maintain all necessary contact through email exchange and this has allowed NERF to advance in its work. Our website (raptorforum.co.uk) now boasts our newly designed logo and under 'Public Statements' shows details of our responses to conservation and illegal persecution issues arising during the year. The 'Roll of Honour' section of the website highlights the recognition we are delighted to give to Dr Cathleen Thomas, Amanda Miller and Bill Hesketh & Bill Murphy who in their various ways have made major contributions to furthering the aims of NERF. One major change this year is that in the absence of an annual *North of England Raptor Conference* the avenue to distribute our the 2019 Annual Review, as a preferred printed copy, has been taken away and practicalities determine that this year's review is available just on-line as a free copy via our website.

The Cheshire RSG only joined the forum in 2016 so their willingness to host our 2019 Conference was generous and much appreciated. NERF welcomed the opportunity to bring the conference to a new area and to some new people. The Conference was held on 23rd November at Chester University and proved very successful with informative presentations by authoritative speakers on topics ranging from Barn Owls, Kestrels, Red Kites in Shropshire, Raptors on the Wirral Estuary and filming raptors around the world. Superintendent Nick Lyall spoke of his work and hopes as chair of the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group. We would like to record our thanks to Cheshire RSG for organising the event and to the RSPB for its sponsorship.

2019 saw the completion of the RSPB's Hen Harrier LIFE Project and NERF's own involvement as a specialist contractor. We have been proud to be associated with this project over the last 5 years which has served to highlight the vulnerable status of Hen Harriers in the UK and brought clarity to understanding the reasons. We look forward to the project's legacy hopefully driving real change to tackle persecution and allow, in the not too distant future, the species to thrive as it should on our moors. NERF members will continue to monitor and report on Hen Harriers and to work alongside likeminded bodies for their wellbeing.

Returning to the constraints of Covid-19; the initial lockdown meant that this year there was no field work monitoring until the second half of May and onwards when the BTO lifted their suspension on nest recording and Schedule 1 licences. It remains to be seen just how this gap in normal coverage at such a critical time in the season will be reflected in the quality and quantity of data collected by members for our 2020 review. It is encouraging that safe and responsible field work was able to be resumed as normal after mid-May in most areas.

David Raw
Secretary to NERF
September 2020

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.

Friends of Red Kites (FoRK) in the north east of England

Extent of coverage: FoRK monitors the continuing fortunes of the population of Red Kites originally released under the Northern Kites Project which was centred on Gateshead Borough, Tyne & Wear. This remains the core breeding and study area and present day

FoRK activities therefore concentrate on this area which straddles the north-west portion of the historic vice-county of Durham and the south-west portion of Northumberland. FoRK also coordinates the monitoring of any Red Kites occurring more widely across County Durham and Northumberland as a whole. *See article elsewhere in this Review.*

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.

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 refer 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

South Peak Raptor Study Group

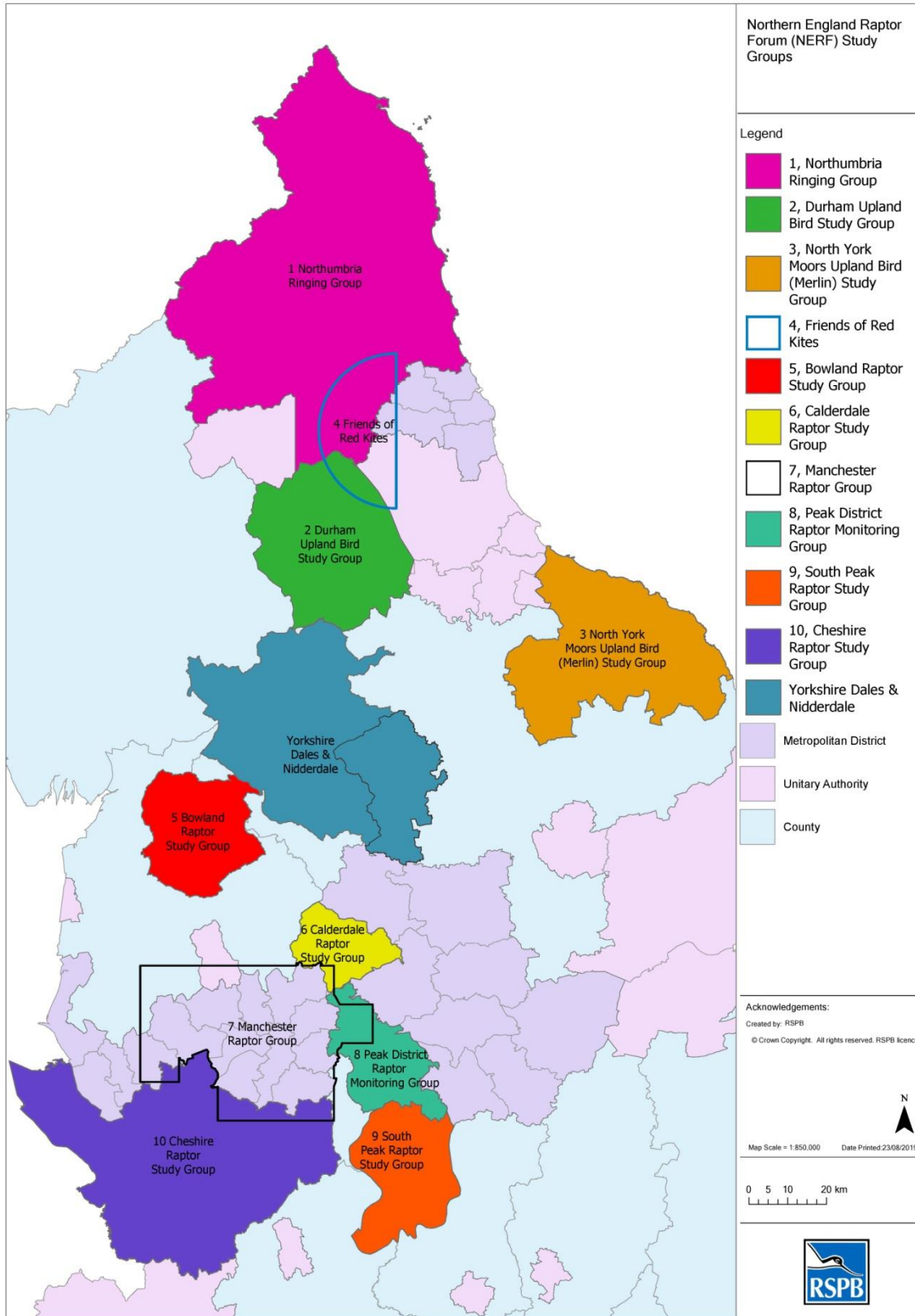
Extent of coverage:

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

Extent of coverage: No formal RSG exists but records of monitoring are gratefully received from several independent sources, especially the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.



NERF is very grateful to Robin Lyon Sinclair at the RSPB for compiling the revised map of the groups' areas.

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.17 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

Species monitored by NERF

GROUP																					
BRSG																					
CaRSG																					
ChRSG																					
DUBSG																					
FoRK																					
MRG																					
NRG																					
NYMRSG																					
PDRMG																					
SPRSG																					
	<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

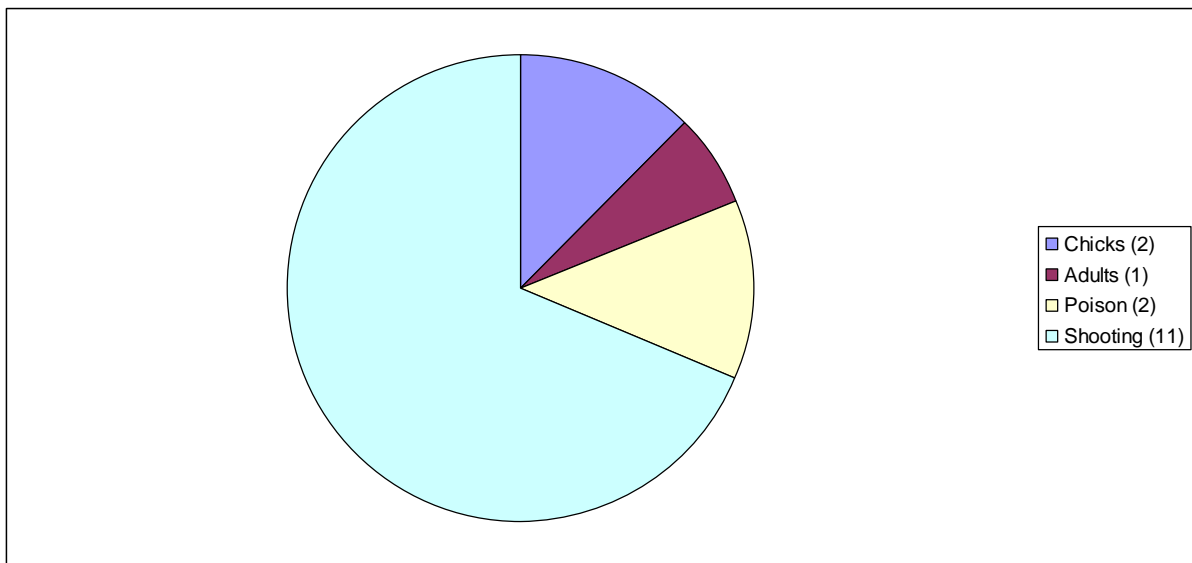
NERF regional persecution data

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 2019 was 16, maintaining the downward trend seen in 2017 (21) and 2018 (22). 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.

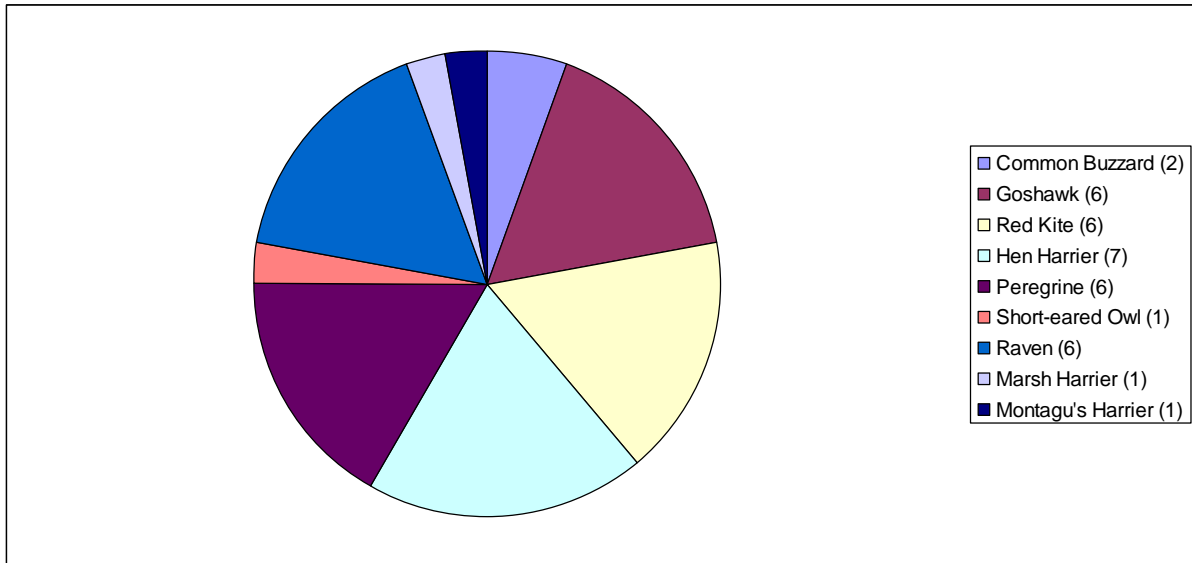
Persecution by type 2019 *(figures in parentheses refer to number of incidents)*



Black Hole species

During 2019 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 2019 (figures in parentheses refer to number of groups listing species)

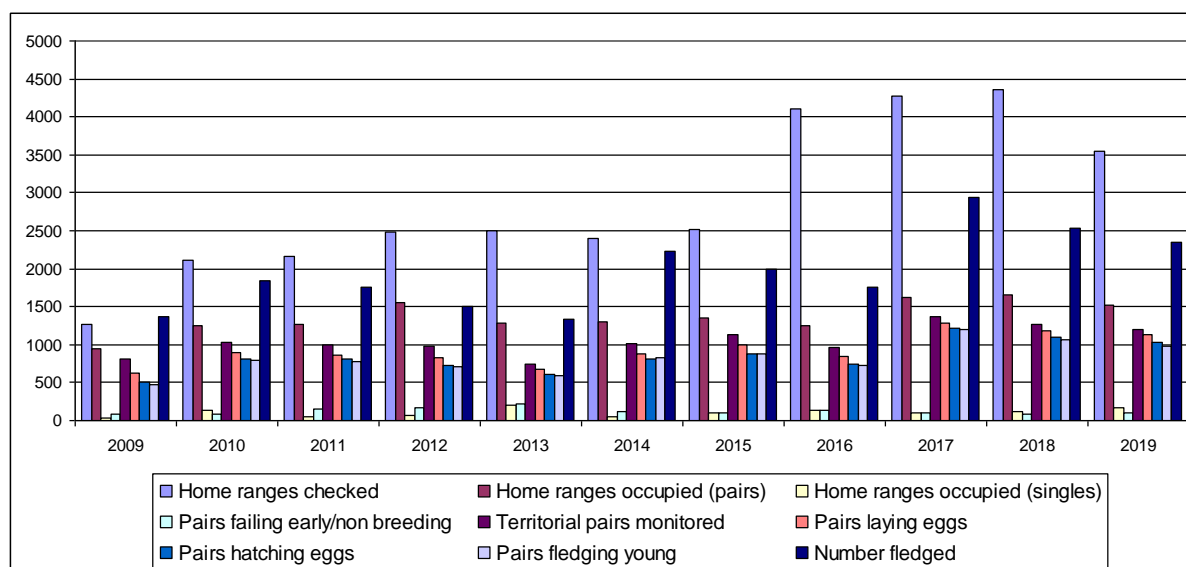


Summary

Within the NERF region 19 raptor species were monitored and / or recorded by Group members during 2019. Additionally this year, there were records for White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle and Rough-legged Buzzard. 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 - 2019 are presented in the table following.

Combined statistics 2009-2019



Most categories showed a decline in 2019 with the most notable being in *Home Ranges Checked*, at 23.09%. However, there was a good reason for this as the decline was in the number of Barn Owls' *Home Ranges Checked*. In 2018 the Cheshire RSG had checked 1816 sites whereas in 2019 they only checked 900. Barn Owl is by far the species with the most *Home Ranges Checked*, at 4360 in 2018 and 3543 in 2019 – almost 3 times as many as the next most common, Tawny Owl, so a major decrease had a more noticeable effect on the statistics. Excepting Tawny Owl, all the owls showed a decline in *Home Ranges Checked* to some extent in 2019.

All other declines were in single figures, with Cheshire's reduction in *Home Ranges Checked* not reflected as much as might be expected in *Home Ranges Occupied*, which declined overall by 8.73%. There was a reduction in *Territorial Pairs Monitored* by 6.45%, in *Pairs Laying Eggs* by 4.04%, in *Pairs Hatching Eggs* by 5.81%, by *Pairs Fledging Young* by 8.67% and by the *Total Number Fledged* by 8.23%. Increases were limited to *Home Ranges Occupied by Singles*, at 46.02% to 163, albeit on a small base figure of just 113 in 2018, and to *Pairs Failing or Non-breeding*, at 18.39% to 103, again on only 87 in 2018. These are both categories in which it is often difficult to collect evidence.

Weather-wise, the year started promisingly with February being the warmest ever recorded, Day after day of sunshine boded well for birds getting in good condition to breed. March and April too were drier than normal. The critical month of May was the 2nd warmest since 1910, and mainly dry, but with spells of rain and thunderstorms in the last week which may have affected nest outcomes. June and July were significantly wetter than normal, which may have accounted for the above declines in productivity.

Appendices 2(a) and 2(b) show *Young Fledged per Pair Laying* and *Territorial Pairs 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 page 127.

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.

Rarer species which occurred but did not breed are included on a separate section at the end of the species reports.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*



Gordon Yates

UK population estimate

188-220 breeding pairs were estimated in the UK in 2018 by RBBP with a 5-year mean of 242. (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2020 *in press*). APEP 4 estimates 240 pairs, 2013-17 (Woodward I. *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113: February 2020) 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. A further scheme to expand the population into southern England, based at Poole harbour, is also underway.

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

The Osprey is a bird which most people “like”, so it has many fewer threats than many other raptors. It is also less prone to disturbance, as it cannot hide itself away like many other raptors.

But as always there are some problems with birds killed when conflict occurs between them and fishing interests, but fortunately this is rare, with many fisherman liking the bird and even going to help those which have got caught in nets at fishing ponds: (the same bird from Kielder was helped 3 times out of nets and returned to nest that same year!)

As the population starts to expand in England with more pairs in Northumberland, Cumbria, Rutland and very quickly in Dorset, there will be more places and birds for people to enjoy and it is people power which will go a long way towards continuing the Osprey’s success.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
NRG	7	6	1	0	6	6	6	5	11	1.83	1.83

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, either passing through or lingering for a few days at Stocks Reservoir, so far always on their own.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Ospreys are only recorded as passage birds as they cross the study area in spring and autumn, During 2019 just 2 records were received; the 1st on 30th March at Ringstone Edge and the 2nd on 16th September at Walshaw Dean.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Numbers of single birds frequent the Cheshire Meres in spring and late summer.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

One to 2 birds again over-summered at Derwent Reservoir but without any sign of nesting. The county remains devoid of any breeding record. There were isolated reports of single passage birds at just 2 more upland reservoirs, one in May and one in August and a juvenile bird flew south across the Stang Forest on the very late date of 11th November. More broadly across the county as a whole, the 1st bird on spring passage was seen at the coast on

19th March with a further 10 reports in April and May. Light return autumn passage was noted in late August and early September.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Does not breed, and rarely lingers. Spring passage (5 records) began on March 31st and lasted until May 17th, and autumn passage was from Jul 31st to Sept 15th, involving 7 birds. This was well below 2018 (18 records) and 2017 (25 sightings).

The misguided erection of a platform on a pole at Pennington Flash by Wigan MBC caused much merriment amongst local birders!

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Another exciting year in Northumberland, with a record number of clutches laid and an unmated male with a nest.

Six pairs laid eggs this year with clutches of 4, 3, 3, 3, 3 and 2.

The pair with a clutch of 2 was new, present in 2018 as sub-adults, and now old enough to breed for the first time. The nests went on to fledge broods of 3,2,2,2, 2 = 11 chicks but the remaining nest of the new pair (2 chicks) failed in a freak accident. At about 6 days old, when still very small, the female had just fed them and was about to take the fish remains off the nest, but as she did so, a piece of fishing line attached to the fish got tangled round some of the nest, and when the female left the nest, the line pulled across the nest knocking the 2 chicks out! Sadly, the fall killed them.

On a happier note, the male UV which was hatched at Kielder in 2015 returned again, as in 2018, but this time, built a nest in a pine tree, displaying and calling, but he never attracted a female: fingers crossed for next year.

Ospreys are regular birds now in Northumberland. Summering birds are seen throughout the spring and summer. Wandering birds can be seen on any river or lake, so it's only a matter of time until the population starts to expand away from 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.

Passage birds were recorded only at the favoured migration stopover, Scaling Dam Reservoir this year. Singles were observed there on 2 days in April, (the only spring records), one day in August, 4 days in September and 3 days in October.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

There were several sightings of birds on passage in the spring, summer and autumn months.

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 increase in populations around the UK again resulted in frequent sight records reported to the DOS in the study area in the spring and the autumn months, mainly on the Derwent and

Wye rivers and at Carsington Water. Perhaps one day we can look forward to having breeding Ospreys in the Peak District.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

A scarce passage migrant, with single birds occasionally summering.

NERF regional summary

The Northumbrian population continued to expand at Kielder with 6 nests and another unmated male building a nest.

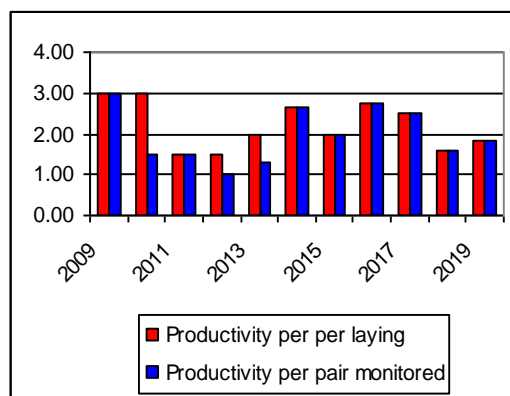
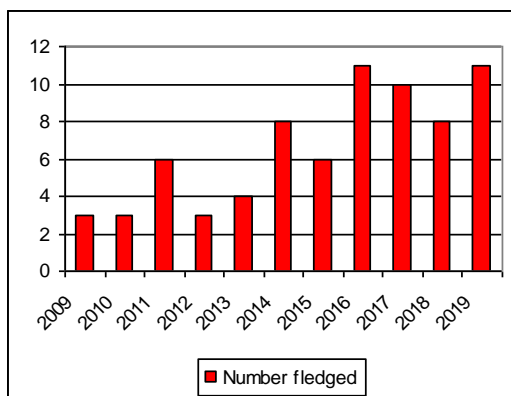
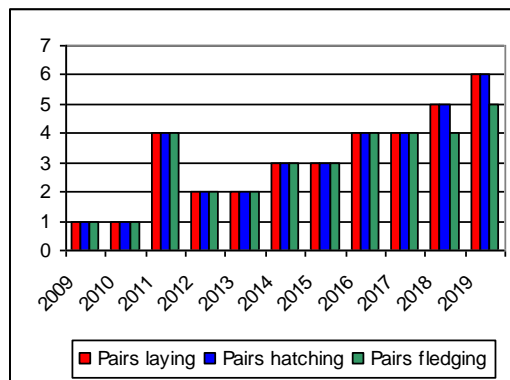
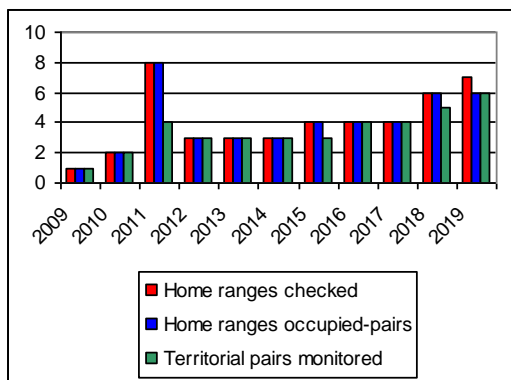
But even in Northumberland Ospreys show no real attempt at the moment in starting up a new nesting area; this is a surprise as there seems to be no shortage of birds in the county, with Ospreys recorded at about 50 different sites (Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club data 2018).

As for the rest of the NERF recording area, it is the same story with the likes of Durham, North York Moors, and the Peak District all recording numbers of passage birds in spring and late summer. Some of these areas have a number of good water bodies for Ospreys to nest nearby but as yet there has been little interest.

Away from these areas there is less Osprey activity, with few birds in Cheshire and even less in Calderdale and Bowland - maybe relating to the lack of good waters for fishing?

Ospreys will use nest platforms, either a nest on a pole or a nest made in a tree. In Kielder Forest nearly all the birds use nests on poles in very open areas; this is a good way to “manage” the nesting birds so there is little conflict with forestry operations.

Comparative data 2009-2019



Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*



John Harwood

UK population estimate

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. In Woodward *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020 the previous estimate is repeated and is considered the best current estimate. The RBBP 5-year mean of 39 for 2013 to 2017 is at the lower end of this range and is believed to be an underestimate. Roberts and Law(2014) estimated 100-150 pairs; while their figures could be correct, it is felt that further survey work is required to confirm that this estimate is robust. A national survey is scheduled for 2020.

24-47 pairs were reported in 2017, with a 5 year mean of 41 (Eaton, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2018. RBBP 2020 *in press*).

Conservation status

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

Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

National and regional threat assessment

The most serious threat to the welfare of this species in the UK arises from the attentions of egg collectors, clutches of these birds being highly prized. However, the secretive, low profile behaviour of birds whilst nesting works in their favour. Location of nests from observation is invariably extremely time-consuming, and often an ultimately unsuccessful undertaking. Direct persecution from gun or trap in Britain is of relatively rare incidence compared to that suffered by other large raptors as the species presents no threat to grouse or

other gamebirds. As carrion-feeding by the species is virtually unknown, poisoning also presents little threat.

Extremely wet summers can have a catastrophic effect on breeding success if there is large scale wash-out of bee and wasp nests. Fortunately, UK birds migrate to Africa in relative safety crossing the Mediterranean via Gibraltar. No doubt hunters will account for some birds over the course of their travels but nothing approaching the numbers shot illegally further east in Malta over the autumn migration period.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home ranges occupied (pairs)	Homes ranges occupied (singles)	Pairs failing early / non breeding	Territorial pairs monitored	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known Pairs hatching eggs	Known Pairs fledging young	Known Number fledged	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
NYMUBSG	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
SPRSG	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
TOTAL	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00

Group Reports

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

There was only one sighting of a Honey Buzzard in the study area during 2019. A single bird was seen flying south over Ringstone Edge on 17th September.

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.

The first arrivals were 2 birds on the 11th and 12th May, quite early dates. Five individuals were recorded during the season – all photographed – 3 males and 2 females. Only 3 of the birds were resident throughout spring and summer, the other 2, a pale-plumaged male and a dark plumaged female were just one-day visitors. A known pale male bird, returning for this 3rd consecutive year, was regularly recorded displaying vigorously across the whole season. A new female from 11th May and new male bird of striking plumage from 17th June onwards, spent the whole season in the area interacting regularly with the known male. Sadly, there were never any signs observed to indicate nesting anywhere. The season simply petered out over July with visible activity gradually reducing. The last observation of a bird was on 24th August. Elsewhere in the NYMs 2 birds were observed on a few days in mid-summer – probably non-breeding transients.

So, another non-productive season. The last known nest was recorded in 2016 and the present situation is clearly quite depressing and somewhat demotivating for the team of regular observers who really deserve some success for the considerable amount of fieldwork they

devote to this species each season. It is to be hoped 2020 produces more birds and a more positive outcome from them.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeding species – nests monitored when found. A single report of a sighting in the study area in 2019.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeding species – nests monitored when found.

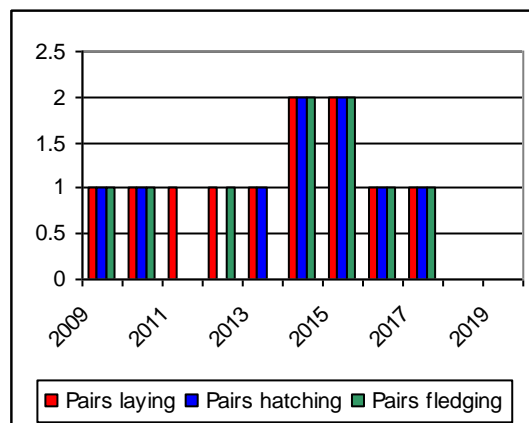
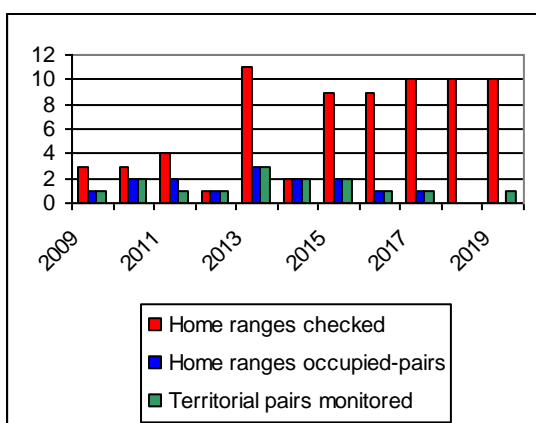
An adult male bird observed close to the 2017 breeding site on 31 May was believed to be the male involved in the 2016-2018 activity: it was not seen subsequently in the SPRSG area. However, the bird, easily identifiable from photographs, spent much of the 2019 summer in the Sherwood Forest area of Nottinghamshire.

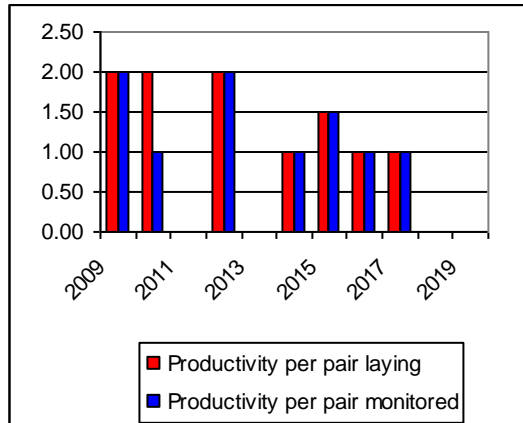
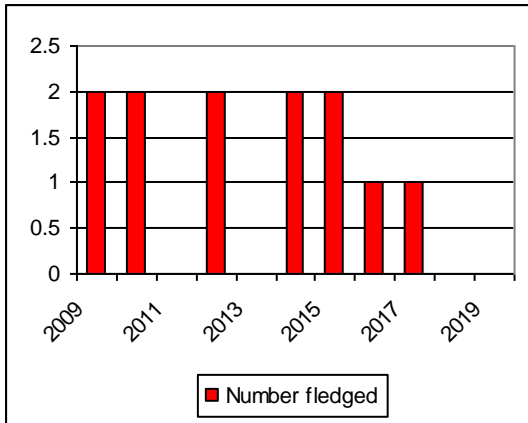
There were no reports of birds from any of the other Groups.

NERF regional summary

The situation regarding the small NYMs population continues to be disheartening. It is now 3 years since successful breeding was recorded there. It is also very disappointing that no nesting occurred at the South Peak District site following the success of the county’s debut pair in 2017. It is possible that environmental problems might be the root cause of failures to breed perhaps by affecting wasp and bee populations adversely. Certainly extreme weather events which produce prolonged deluges that cause large-scale flooding cannot be good for the welfare of these insect’s nests. This also seems to be the view held by those studying this species elsewhere in Britain where successful breeding has, apparently, been poor.

Comparative data 2009-2019





Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*



David Bretherton

UK population estimate

In 2020 the population was estimated at 30500 pairs (Woodward I. *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020). The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey report for 2019 in England showed a 7% decrease 2018-19, a 28% decrease 2008-18 and a 32% decrease in the period 1995-2018.

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)

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 at some lofts, and secondly there is the erroneous belief, held by some people, that the Sparrowhawk is responsible for long-term declines in songbird populations. As a result of these there are calls in some quarters for the Sparrowhawk population to be controlled, despite there being very little scientific evidence to support these allegations.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing early or non-breeding	Territorial pairs monitored known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaSG	7	7	NC	NC	2	2	1	1	2	1.00	1.00
MRG*	12	12	NC	1	7	6	6	6	12	2.00	1.71
NRG	41	28	0	1	21	21	20	18	27	1.29	1.29
NYM	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
PDRMG	20	8	NC	2	6	6	5	4	15	2.50	2.50
TOTAL	84	56	0	4	36	35	32	29	56	1.60	1.56

*UNDERSTATED FIGURE – assumes a minimum of 1 young from some successful nests where the precise number of young could not be determined. See respective RSG text for productivity values from any nests with an accurately known number of young

Group Reports

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Regrettably, the Calderdale Raptor Study Group does not have sufficient resources to commit to studying this species in depth. Nonetheless the Group meticulously records sightings of the birds.

In 2019 there were 192 records received by the Group's recorder. Displaying birds were noted at 7 sites during the spring and breeding was confirmed at only 2 of these sites. It was confirmed that 2 young were reared at Jumble Hole Clough, Hebden Bridge. The outcome at the 2nd nest is not known. Two other sites were strongly suspected to have held breeding pairs and the adults were reportedly seen carrying food during the breeding season. However, the information in relation to these reports is too sparse to include them in this review. The Group also received a report that there was a successful pair at Northowram; however once again we lack enough detail to include this pair.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Fairly common widespread resident. Records seem to emanate from sightings across the county - very under-recorded. Displaying birds were recorded at 96 sites across the county. Grey Squirrel egg predation was noted at one site.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

233 records were collected from manchesterbirding.com and members, considerably less than in 2017-18 (274 in each year). Confirmed breeding was recorded at 7 sites, with a minimum number of 6 young fledged. An examination of records suggested that territories (defined as at least 3 sightings in the period 20th March to 20th July) were held at a further 5 sites, one of which failed. Twenty other sites had one or 2 sightings in this period.

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.

The 2 study areas continued in 2019. The Border Forest Kielder had a poor year, after the good year in 2018, with many 2018 sites unoccupied. Nevertheless, 16 nests were found fledging 14 young (compared to 29 young from 15 nests in 2018).

A further 7 Home Ranges were found to be occupied but not followed through to outcome. Four nests failed due to Goshawk predation, one due to predation of the adult female and the other 3 due to the chicks being predated. A single chick escaped and was found living on the ground still being fed by its parents.

In the Slaley Forest study area 5 nests fledged 12 young; all the nests were found in Sitka Spruce. A site that failed in 2018 due to a Goshawk was successful after the birds moved into denser woodland.

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.

Other priorities mean that little resource is available for monitoring Sparrowhawk. Of the sites checked, one pair was thought to be nesting, unfortunately due to time constraints, the situation was not resolved. It is thought that there has been no perceptible change in the density of birds across the North Yorks Moors study area and that there is currently no cause for concern for this species.

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 again limited the monitoring of this relatively common species. Work continued as usual in the long-term study site in South Yorkshire, where 4 nests were monitored, 2 were successful fledging 9 young; the other 2 nests failed, one with an egg found at the base of the tree and at the other predated young could be seen on the nest. Elsewhere, several active nests were located whilst surveying for other species, evidence suggested most of these were successful. Two nests were fully monitored away from the long-term study area, one nest produced 5 fledged young, the 2nd nest contained one live and 2 dead young, Avian trichomonosis (Flounces) is thought to be responsible for the loss of the those young birds. Further work needs to be done on this species, for it is felt that Sparrowhawks continue to slowly decline from their peak numbers in the 1990s.

NERF regional summary

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

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 gentiles*



Paul Thorpe

UK population estimate

517-735 pairs were reported to RBBP in 2018 with a 5 year mean of 673 (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2020 *in press*). The latest APEP figure is 620 pairs, based on RBBP data 2013-2017. (Woodward *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020).

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 Northern Goshawk is a notoriously elusive, generalist raptor that suffers from persistent illegal interference and is absent from large areas of prey-rich, suitable breeding habitat as undertones of this archaic mentality remain. Although Goshawks are fully protected by law, and holds the current UK Conservation status of Green, they remain vulnerable and continue to face many threats nationwide. Unfortunately, even in this day and age, illegal persecution by humans in rural areas remains the primary threat to the species. Forestry operations and recreation are of growing concern in some areas, but NERF Groups have shown that engagement with forest operators can help overcome the former. For decades now on the continent the Goshawk has shown it can successfully colonise prey-rich urban areas. Although largely dependent on mature forest, data from across the NERF study groups continue to demonstrate prey availability is unlikely to be a major constraint and that mere survival is the species' main challenge, with population expansion, consistent with many of the raptor species studied by NERF, restricted by persistent disturbance. Any 'stable populations' exist for the most part in the more heavily forested areas and principally on the higher ground. As such, the Goshawk remains a rare breeding bird in the more accessible lowland areas, which should be naturally richer in prey and thus far more productive. We continue to expand our knowledge of the species, in particular about local Goshawk movements in the uplands with long-term breeding studies, camera and tracking technology now providing increasingly valuable data, yet there remains an urgent need to better understand predator-environment interactions and the response to change. As reports of illegal activity continue to grow it is of the utmost importance that action is needed to combat ongoing disturbance and illegal persecution against the species.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home ranges occupied (pairs)	Home ranges occupied (singles)	Pairs failing early / non breeding	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum Number fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSG	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
CaRSG	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
DUBSG	6	3	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
NRG	64	44	6	5	39	39	28	18	35	0.89	0.89
NRG (Cumbria)	5	5	0	0	5	5	5	3	4	0.80	0.80
PDRMG	13	2	NC	0	2	2	2	2	3	1.50	1.50
SPRSG	23	23	NC	NC	18	18	13	13	23	1.27	1.27
TOTAL	113	78	9	6	65	65	49	37	67	1.37	1.03

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeding species, nests monitored when found.

A pair was seen displaying early in the spring but was not thought to have bred. There is abundant habitat for this species in Bowland and the continuing failure of this species to breed in many areas of Bowland is almost certainly down to persecution.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

In common with previous years the Calderdale RSG failed to locate a breeding pair of Goshawk in 2019. Once again, taking in to account the amount of suitable habitat available, this is an extremely disappointing outcome. The traditional home range was checked during the breeding season on several occasions and as in previous years it was found to be occupied by a single male for just a few days. Throughout 2019 only 5 acceptable records were received. In late winter / early spring an adult male was seen on 2 separate days in February and a different bird was recorded on 2nd March. Two females were also noted in late summer / early autumn. The first was recorded on 6th August at one site and the 2nd, a different female, was recorded at another location on 15th October. The Group received a report of an adult female with 2 juvenile birds in July. However, the photographs proved inconclusive and the report was rejected.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Rare resident and county rarity. Low detection of displaying birds notably Astbury Mere and as previous years, Macclesfield Forest and in lowland near to Peckforton Castle.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

Just one pair was located in the main study area despite considerable survey effort. It was once again successful in fledging young. Elsewhere the outcomes were less clear. In spring pairs were seen at 2 locations and displaying lone males at 2 other sites but follow up proved inconclusive in all cases.

Whilst accepting a degree of under recording is likely it is clear that the species remains scarce across the county.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Part of upland areas.

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

Northumberland: The Northumbrian population continues to expand with another good year for occupation. This year saw another increase with 44 Home Rangers (41 in 2018) but the number of fledged chicks remained the same at 35. The failure rate was high this year with many pairs failing in a very wet week in early June, disastrous for small chicks. The number of single birds remained the same at 6 so the population still has room to grow in the study areas. In the Kielder Border Forest, 2 nests were predated by avian raptors, believed to be

other Goshawks! Another nest with chicks collapsed, and at one nest site the whole tree had blown down.

The Northumbria RG would like to thank Forestry England for its continuing support over the timing of forest operations in the nesting season.

Cumbria: Members of NRG also assist in monitoring an area in the eastern part of Cumbria and the results are reported here and given in the table.

An excellent year was recorded with 5 home ranges all occupied; all 5 pairs hatched eggs but only 3 were known to fledge young.

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. They are concerned that the significantly greater increase in felling over the last few years is beginning to cause real problems with displaced birds competing with established territorial birds for diminishing nesting habitat resources. The increasing Buzzard population in the study area is also now contributing to the problem by vying with Goshawks for occupation at some of the latter's sites. Overall, the species experienced a fairly mediocre season with brood sizes generally small.

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.

Goshawks remain seriously under-represented in the PDRMG study area. Two pairs were recorded breeding in 2019; the inclement weather is thought to be responsible for the low fledging rate. Encouragingly one of the successful pairs was on the boundary of a private estate, the first known success at this historical site for over 20 years.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Goshawk has been included as a key species in the Peak District Bird of Prey Initiative from 2016 onwards and once again the Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group covered the Upper Derwent Valley area in conjunction with South Peak Raptor Study Group in 2019. Five pairs were successful in this area and 9 young successfully fledged. Elsewhere in the SPRSG recording area at least 18 sites were occupied, and a minimum total of 14 young fledged from 8 known successful nests. At 5 sites pairs bred but failed and at a further 5 sites breeding was suspected, but not proved; the presence of displaying and calling birds and the later presence of immature birds suggested breeding. However, at one of the successful sites a dead fledged young bird was found on the ground below the nest.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Unconfirmed reports of birds(s) at 2 different sites.

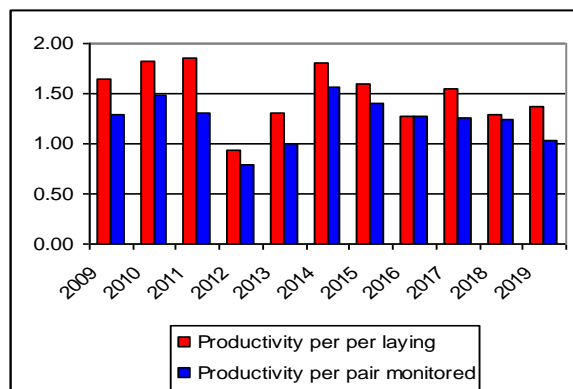
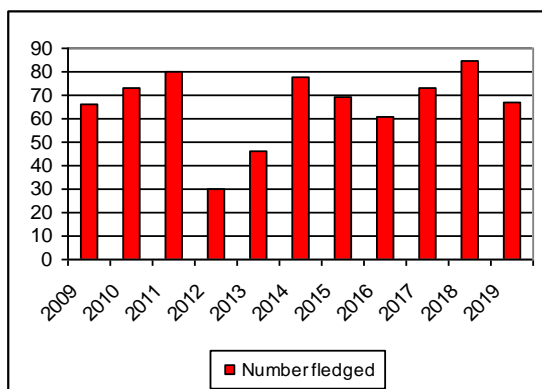
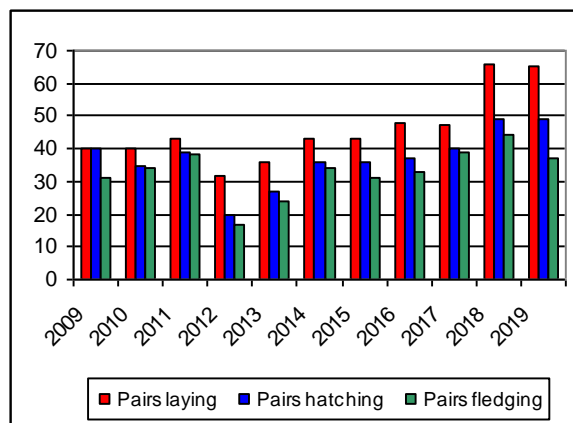
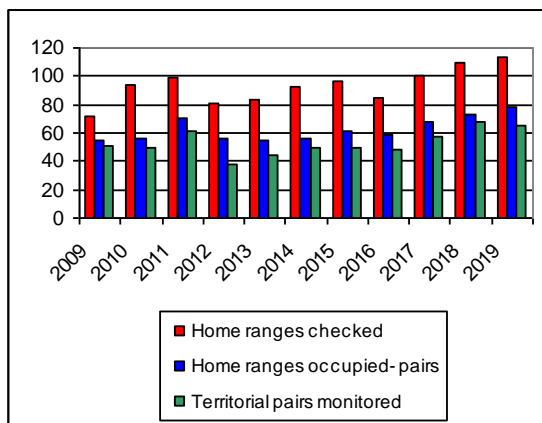
NERF regional summary

Recurrently, 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

once more requested that population figures be withheld. A modest increase in occupied home ranges was again noted in Northumberland, although the number of young fledged fell below 1 per nest (0.89) from pairs known to lay eggs (1.08 in 2018). The story was similar in Cumbria where 3 pairs were known to fledge only 4 young from 5 occupied sites.

Encouragingly in the South Peaks successful breeding was recorded for the first time in over 20 years at a historical site on the boundary of a private estate. Despite a reduced number of territories occupied by pairs, productivity was slightly higher SPRSG (1.27) and PDRMG (1.5). As usual however, despite sporadic successes, these are offset by the results from other NERF members. Consistent with the findings above brood sizes are again small in the North York Moors, where tree felling is of increased concern as the increasing Buzzard population now competes with displaced Goshawks for diminishing nesting habitat. In Calderdale once again, despite an abundance of suitable habitat, no successful breeding pairs were recorded and in Durham only one pair was located breeding successfully in the main study area, and the species remains scarce across the county. Across the NERF Study Groups the Goshawk continues to face a number of threats, the average young fledged is as low as 1.03 per pair and intentional disturbance and illegal persecution remain of prime concern, to the breeding status and future prosperity of the species.

Comparative data 2009-2019



Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*



Andy Thompson

UK population estimate

344-423 pairs were reported to RBBP in 2018 (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2020 *in press*). The last national survey was in 2005, finding 429 pairs, and BBS data has been used to extrapolate from this, estimating a total of 590-695 pairs. (Woodward *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020.)

Conservation status

UK: Amber

European: Least concern

Global: Least concern

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

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 negative impact of egg collecting could be locally significant. As the species gradually moves in to the northern uplands to breed, birds are likely to face an increasing threat of persecution if they attempt to breed on heather moorland, which is dominated by driven grouse shooting.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	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
ChRSG	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
NRG	2	2	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	1.00	1.00
TOTAL	3	3	0	0	3	3	3	3	4	1.33	1.33

No other Group reported Marsh Harriers attempting to breed in their respective Study Areas during 2019.

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.

A few individual birds are recorded annually each spring and summer. In the majority of cases most birds are simply passing through the Study Area with the occasional individual lingering for a few days. There were no accounts of 2 birds being seen together but consequently no breeding attempts were recorded.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland areas.

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

Whilst this species does not breed in the Study Area the number of recorded sightings continues to increase annually. During 2019 the Group received 26 confirmed reports, compared to 16 that were received during 2018. From the observations it is believed that the 26 sightings, all of which were noted between 13th July and 21st September, referred to just 5 or 6 individuals.

One bird occupied the traditional Hen Harrier roost from 13th July to 10th September and was joined by a second bird from 9th August until 10th September.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

In common with previous years Marsh Harriers were recorded on passage throughout 2019 and the number of birds being recorded during spring continues to increase annually. During 2018 the Group monitored a breeding pair on the Dee Estuary in partnership with the RSPB. Whilst the breeding attempt was successful it was disappointing that the pair only fledged a single chick. The birds returned in 2019 and once again bred successfully, fledging 2 chicks. Although this success represents a 100% increase on the 2018 fledging rate it is still disappointing when the average clutch size is 4 or 5 eggs.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

There were no reports of Marsh Harrier from upland areas during 2019, where in recent years occasional spring and autumn passage birds have been recorded. The persistent absence of Marsh Harriers in the Durham uplands inevitably leads the Group to consider the birds as a 'black hole' species in the Study Area.

Birds were present on the Tees marshes from February through until December and bred there for only the second time on record.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

During 2019 the Group received 39 reports from across the Study Area. Whilst the number of sightings has continued to increase over recent years, it is suspected that 18 of these sightings related to 5 birds observed on consecutive or nearby dates at the same or neighbouring locations. With the exception of one sighting, the birds were described as female/juvenile types. The single exception was described as an immature male.

Despite the relatively large number of sightings being received there was no evidence of attempted breeding, nor the formation of potential breeding territories being defended.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Marsh Harriers rarely breed in the North of England and over the last four years, whilst birds have been present, their breeding success has been sporadic. In 2016 a pair fledged 4 young. The following year a pair, presumed to be the same, returned to the same location and laid 4 eggs. Whilst they all hatched the chicks died during an extended period of adverse weather. During 2018 the Study Group once again located a pair in April and the birds appeared to be settling-in to a familiar pre-breeding pattern. Unfortunately throughout early and mid-April cold dense coastal fog covered the nest site and led to the breeding attempt failing.

Following the disappointment experienced during 2017 and 2018 the situation changed favourably during 2019. The Group located 2 nests, both of which contained adult females, being provisioned by a 1st calendar year male. Both nests were successful and fledged one chick each. Whilst the productivity was lower than would have been expected, on the positive side they were both successful.

With Marsh Harriers being recorded breeding or attempting to breed during the last 4 years it is quite possible that the breeding population will increase within the Study Area over the coming years.

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.

At present, on the North York Moors, the status of this species continues to be that of a spring and autumn passage migrant. There is ample suitable breeding habitat for the species across the NYM uplands and it is inconceivable that the species does not breed in the area for any other reason than it is being suppressed by persecution.

With the departure of the Hawk & Owl Trust from Fylingdales Moor there were no Marsh Harrier records from there; normally a regular location for sightings. Migrants were recorded at Scaling Dam and Lockwood Beck Reservoirs, and from the Sleddale and Liverton / Waupley Moors in April, May and August. In all probability these sightings were of just 6 or 7 individuals, seen on multiple occasions.

The records included report of a “cream crown” bird being vigorously harassed by a female Merlin on 21st July as it crossed the falcon’s nesting territory situated on one of the northern moors. A bird shot near Wykeham, to the south-east of the NYMs, in mid-August was recovered and treated by expert avian vets at the Battle Flatts Veterinary Clinic before being cared for by Jean Thorpe at her Ryedale Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre. Despite receiving serious injuries the bird was returned to good health and successfully released back into the wild.

There is little doubt that the NYMs are a black hole for this species.

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 recorded in the Study Area annually but infrequently during spring, summer and autumn. 2019 followed the same pattern as previous years with birds being observed on passage throughout the season. Once again no evidence of breeding was reported.

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.

In common with previous years during 2019 only occasional sightings of this species were reported from upland locations within the Study Area during the period from May to July.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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 Park. However, there have been several unsuccessful breeding attempts on moorland areas adjacent to the YDNP in recent years and it may only be a matter of time before they cross the Park boundary to breed. A small but increasing number of passage migrants were recorded during 2019.

NERF regional summary

The breeding pattern across the NERF Study Area during 2019 mirrored that of 2018. Once again only the Northumbria Ringing Group and the Cheshire Raptor Study Group reported breeding attempts. One pair fledged 2 chicks in Cheshire and whilst this success is to be celebrated, and it represents a doubling of the number of chicks fledged in 2018, it is nonetheless disappointing when considering that the average clutch size is 4 or 5 eggs for this species.

In Northumberland the RSG located 2 nests, both containing adult females which were being provisioned by a polygamous 1st calendar year male. Disappointingly only one chick fledged from each of the nests.

In common with previous years, the majority of NERF Study Groups reported that birds had been seen on passage during spring, summer and autumn with some individuals remaining for short periods on potential breeding grounds during summer. It is evident from the data collected over many years by NERF members that Marsh Harriers are under-represented as a breeding species in the North of England. Taking into account the number of birds observed on passage crossing the region annually, the fact that there is ample suitable habitat coupled with the proven persecution incident on Denton Moor in 2017 it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the population is being illegally suppressed. Several of the member Groups believe Marsh Harriers fit in to the category of a ‘black hole’ species within their Study Area. If Marsh Harriers do attempt to breed in the NERF Study Area all of the available evidence indicates that they are vulnerable to persecution and Raptor Workers in general and our members in particular will be required to protect them on their breeding grounds.

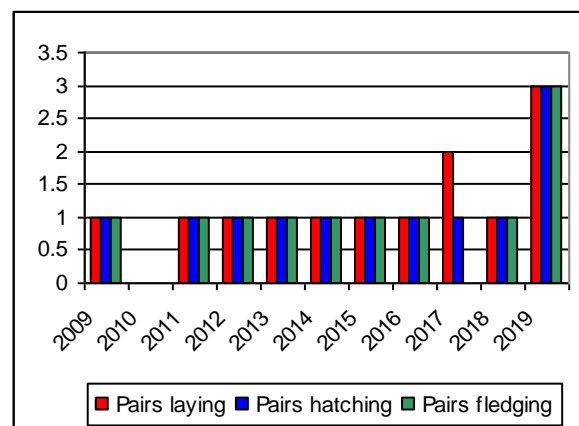
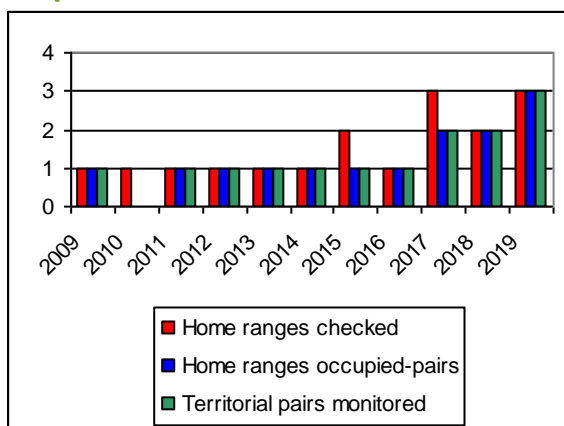
As an aid to preventing raptor persecution in the northern uplands NERF supports the introduction of vicarious liability for landowners and land managers in cases where persecution, attempted persecution of raptors or going equipped to persecute a bird of prey is proven to have taken place and an employee is found to be linked to one or more of those offences. NERF also supports a system of licensing of driven grouse shooting designed to act as a deterrent to anyone intent on persecuting passage or nesting birds. Critics of this proposal insist that such a licensing scheme would be unenforceable and therefore should not be attempted. Whilst NERF does not share this view, at the present time, we do accept policing the scheme would require sufficient dedicated resources if such a scheme were to be effective. The provision of those resources is a matter for the Government to resolve and suitable and sustained pressure may be needed to ensure that successive Governments fulfil any future legal obligations.

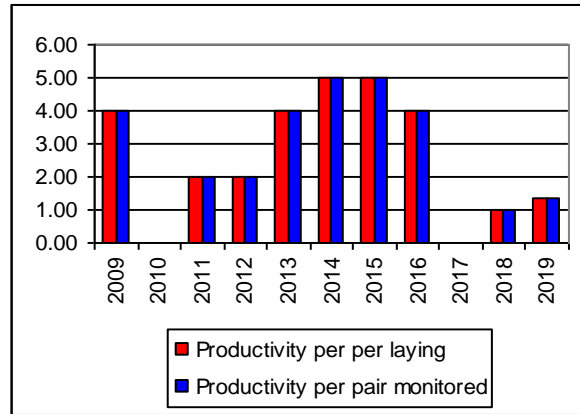
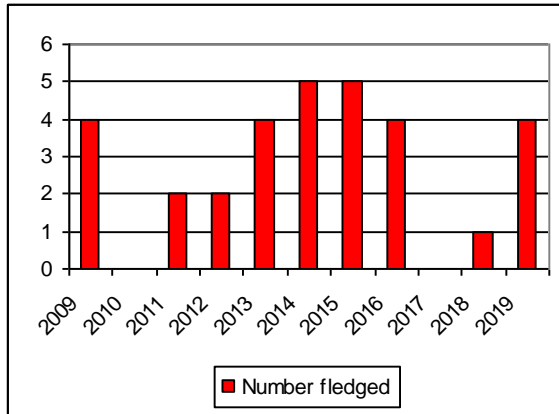
Wing-tagging project

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.

He would welcome sightings of any birds seen in the NERF region. Sightings should be forwarded to Phil at phil@mal5041.plus.com, or by mobile on 07748 556758. Please include the tag letter and number, time and date, location, including the grid reference if possible, age and sex in the report.

Comparative data 2009-19





Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*



RSPB:James Bray

UK population estimate

The 2016 national survey, in which there were significant local contributions from NERF member groups, provides the most recent population estimate for the UK and Isle of Man at 575 territorial pairs. (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). The majority of breeding pairs were in Scotland and 35 in Wales, 46 in Northern Ireland, 30 in the Isle of Man and at that time a mere 4 in England. The 2016 survey also took care to accurately survey 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 in that year.

The latest APEP survey (Woodward *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020) estimated 545 pairs in the UK, and RBBP had 236-387 pairs reported to them in 2018.

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: September 2017)

National and regional threat assessment

Natural England's data from its programme of tracking the movements of young birds from English and Scottish nests that had been fitted with satellite tags (2019 Murgatroyd, M. *et al.* Nature Communication, <http://go.nature.com/2JuoRfo>) highlighted the known issue of illegal persecution. A staggering 72% of 58 tagged birds in the study were confirmed or thought very likely to have been illegally killed. The likelihood of Hen Harriers dying or disappearing in unexplained circumstances over land predominantly covered by grouse moor was 10 times that of non- grouse moors. Regrettably there were marked spatial clusters of missing tagged birds, fate unknown, within the NERF recording area including Yorkshire Dales NP and the North Pennine & Bowland SPAs. Natural England concluded that illegal persecution is having a major impact on the conservation status of the species. This remains the UK's most persecuted bird of prey.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSRG	20+	7	4+	2	5	5	5	5	22	4.4	4.4
CaRSG	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
DUBSG	8	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
MRG	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
NRG	13	6	3	0	6	6	5	3	9	1.5	1.5
NYMUBSG	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
PDRMG	7	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2.0	2.0
SPRSG	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
TOTAL	61	14	10	3	12	12	11	9	33	2.75	2.75

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

2019 saw a very welcome increase in the breeding population in Bowland with 5 successful nests, compared to 3 in 2018 which in turn had been the first here since 2015. In 2019, 22 chicks hatched and rather remarkably, all 22 fledged successfully. These pairs were all on the United Utilities Bowland Estate; there have been no records of Hen Harriers nesting on an adjacent private shooting estate in Bowland since 2010.

Nests were also seen being built at 3 further locations on the United Utilities Estate - by a female paired with a young male which had one of the active nests with another female, by a lone male and by a pair that did not linger for more than a few days. These 3 attempts did not progress to egg-laying.

Five breeding pairs is still well below the number that bred annually in Bowland in the 2000s, and well below the number that the Bowland Special Protection Area is designated for (13 pairs), so it must be hoped that the population continues to recover.

None of the young harriers that had been fitted with satellite tags in Bowland nests in 2018 survived to being a year old. Three birds suddenly and suspiciously disappeared in areas of intensive grouse shooting. One of these, named 'River', was found dead in North Yorkshire within a few miles of where another Bowland satellite-tagged harrier was found shot dead in 2012. On examination, River's body was also found to contain lead shot.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeder, nests monitored when found.

In 2018 two active nests had been located on a grouse moor in the west of the study area; both nests were being provisioned by a single, polygamous male. Regrettably both of the nests failed though the cause of these failures was never fully understood and remains a cause for concern. A comprehensive report of these events can be found in the NERF Annual Review 2018.

2019 started well when 2 birds were located in early January on the 2018 breeding grounds, which is also a winter roost. They remained there throughout March. One bird departed at the end of March, leaving a single bird present during April and May. At the end of May this last bird also left the area. There was also an unconfirmed report of a pair sky-dancing at Shuttleworth Moor on 6th April; however despite extensive observations there were no further reports from this area.

Group members located a female back in the roost on 15th July and she was present until October. Throughout late summer the number of birds in the roost steadily increased to a maximum of 7 individuals on 20th October. Two males and a satellite-tagged female, which was not transmitting, were present in this group of 7. They remained until 27th October after which the number of birds reduced to 3. This smaller group held together until the end of November and during December a maximum of only 2 birds were seen on any single day. In total, 2019 produced 132 individual reports from members, the majority of which were generated in the west of the study area from the location of the winter roost / 2018 breeding site. The group believes that Calderdale is a 'black hole' for Hen Harriers on the basis that large numbers of birds do over-winter annually but fail to breed.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County

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

Birds over-wintered on the Dee estuary with a maximum of 5 present in November. There were occasional sightings along the riverine estuary corridors.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

Level of monitoring: Excellent coverage; nearly all suitable habitat is monitored annually. Regular observations at known roost sites over the winter, spring and autumn periods showed only low numbers to be present. One roost held 3 ringtails in January declining to just one by late February and the same roost supported 2-3 ringtails from October through to year-end. A grey male was seen at another traditional roost site in late September but not subsequently. DUBSG members participated in the coordinated roost watches organised by NERF across the whole of northern England. Eight to 10 potential roost sites were monitored by members in Durham over each of the 3 planned weekends and a total of 88 hours of observation were logged. Despite this effort, only the one roost site mentioned above was found to be occupied.

Extensive monitoring of suitable habitat during the spring and summer months failed to find any evidence of breeding or even pairs attempting to establish territory. The spectacle of a full adult male sky-dancing in an upland valley on 23rd May proved a false hope. It had not been seen on earlier visits, nor in the days immediately after, and was presumed to be an unaccompanied bird advertising its presence. There were no other summer sightings apart from a ringtail on Stanhope Moor on 8th August. The last breeding attempt in the county was in 2013.

Away from the western uplands, a juvenile male ringtail which had been present on the north Tees marshes since November 2018 remained in the area until at least 5th March. Single ringtails were recorded from the same general area on 19th and 21st March and 16th and 30th April. These quite possibly involved different individuals on spring coastal passage. There was evidence of light movement in autumn with reports of single ringtails at Whitburn Observatory on 30th August, nearby on 9th October and again at Whitburn on 22nd October. Isolated, single ringtails at Haverton Hole on 10th November and Whitburn on 29th December were the final coastal reports of the year.

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 significant improvement in the number of sightings over the year (22). For the first time for many years a female was present during the breeding season from May 19th to 31st at Little Woolden Moss and a male was photographed on Holcombe Moor May 27th – a pity they didn't meet up! These were the only spring sightings, and the only full male recorded.

Between September 15th to November 9th the visible-migration site at Winter Hill recorded birds on 11 dates including 2 on October 3rd and 12th. There were also further sightings here on November 30th and December 5th. Wintering birds were also reported from the Belmont area – present throughout November – and at Little Woolden Moss on December 23rd and 26th. This latter bird was suspected as ranging as far as Woolston Eyes in Cheshire, and was very difficult to locate.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland areas.

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

It was another good year for the Northumbrian Hen Harriers although natural losses somewhat limited the outcome success of nests.

There were 6 active nests in 2019 (5 in 2018) which fledged 9 chicks (11 in 2018). Clutch sizes were mostly high with 3 nests of 5 eggs, 2 of 4 and one of 1. Of the 6 nests, 2 failed at

the chick stage due to a spell of heavy prolonged rain in the 2nd week of June. One of these involved a 2nd calendar year female on 7-day old chicks and the other, perhaps more surprisingly, failed when the young were already 22 days old. The nest with a single egg never hatched and the female was still sitting after 42 days.

The remaining 3 nests raised 9 chicks, comprising two broods of 4 and a single male fledging from an initial brood of 4 where three of its siblings had been killed by a fox. Some chicks were satellite-tagged by RSPB LIFE+ project and by Natural England and amongst this cohort one fledged young was known to have been taken by an avian predator later in the summer. There were very few reports from elsewhere in the county.

Thanks go to the Northumberland Hen Harrier Protection Partnership whose collective efforts help protect this important population.

North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Excellent coverage of suitable habitat, nests monitored when found. With what has become depressing regularity, once again there was no evidence anywhere in the NYMs of birds displaying or attempting to nest. Individual birds were reported from several areas over the course of the year with regular sightings towards the year end from the well-watched Hartoft area of Rosedale. The “bracken roost” of 2018 on Egton Moor was checked on a few occasions but no birds were registered there and the keeper confirmed it hadn’t been used all winter. Elsewhere, single birds were recorded at Sleddale, (2 occasions); Liverton Moor and Easington High Moor, both adjacent to Scaling Dam Reservoir, (4 records), and Lockwood Beck Reservoir (one record). All bar one of the Sleddale sightings were winter-month observations. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, the Hen Harrier tops the list of “black hole” species in the NYMs as it does of course throughout the uplands of Britain.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Excellent coverage of the study area.

The group responded to all sightings, reported to either the RSPB Hen Harrier Hotline or directly to the group.

A single pair returned to the same site where they had bred in 2018 and were again successful, fledging two young from an initial brood of 4; (5 eggs laid). Despite this apparent success a sat-tagged youngster from the nest was recovered dead shortly afterwards (results of post mortem inconclusive) and it is suspected that the second fledged bird and possibly one or both of the adults also failed to survive, probably due to natural causes.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Given the continuing issues surrounding the very low population levels of Hen Harrier in England, much effort was directed again during 2019 in responding to all sightings of Hen Harriers in the area. SPRSG confirmed that there was no evidence of breeding in the Upper Derwent Valley in 2019.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Reasonable coverage of representative study areas.

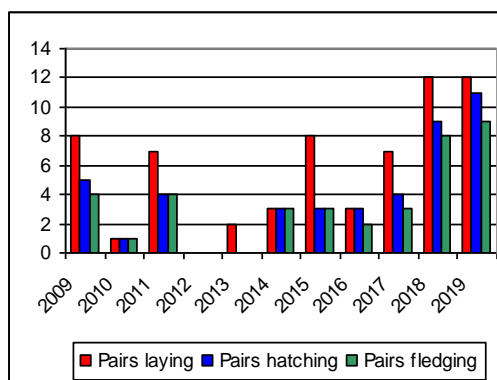
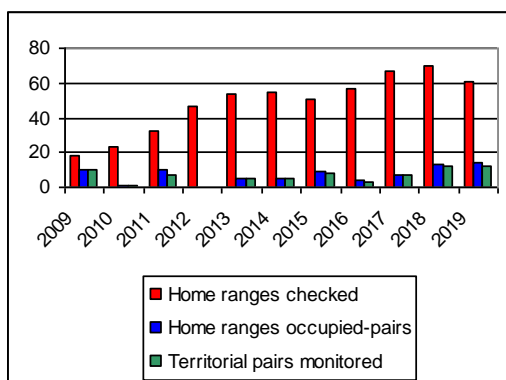
Nesting attempts in the YDNP were monitored by NE staff.

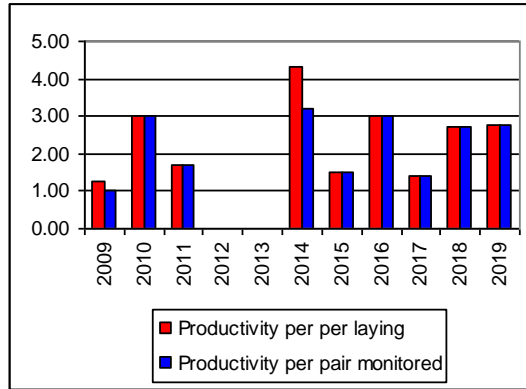
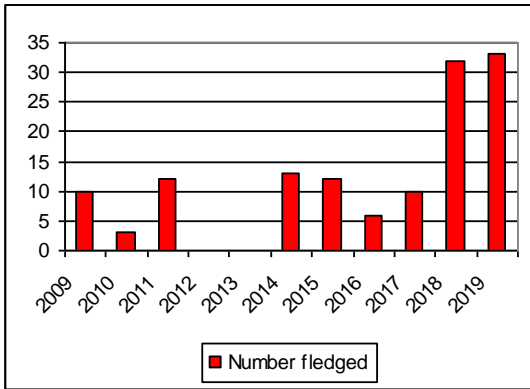
NERF regional summary

This year there were also nests in the north of England additional to those shown in the above table which summarises only records from NERF groups. Overall in England in 2019, 47 chicks fledged from 15 successful nesting attempts. Whilst this represents the best year since at least 2006 the result must be seen in the context of the region having a carrying capacity for breeding Hen Harrier in excess of 300 pairs and worse still, a failure to meet levels expected within both the North Pennine and Bowland SPA citations. The additional nests in 2019 were largely monitored and managed by Natural England within the Yorkshire Dales and Nidderdale. They included the first example of the implementation of Defra's brood management trials in England where young were removed from a nest on a grouse moor estate in Yorkshire Dales to be raised under artificial conditions, and later released in another area of the YDNP. Given that persecution over the autumn and winter months continues to be a risk, based on the historic pattern of loss of signals from satellite-tagged birds, NERF remains opposed to the ill-conceived brood management strategy. Indeed 3 of the 5 chicks which had been satellite tagged as part of the Brood Management Plan soon 'disappeared' after release at locations on grouse moors - one in County Durham and two in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Police investigations were undertaken in all 3 cases. It seems likely that these birds were killed by members of the industry that asked us to trust them not to do so and had been instrumental in the brood management. The pattern fits with the Murgatroyd, M. *et al*'s published paper.

2019 was the final year of NERF member groups working 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. Three weekends in early February, late October and early December were targeted for coordinated roost counts across the region.

Comparative data 2009-2019





Red Kite *Milvus milvus*



FoRK

UK and Ireland population estimate

8500+ breeding pairs is very much an estimate of the UK and Ireland breeding population. Full breeding monitoring is no longer feasible - particularly in major population regions such as Wales and The Chilterns. (The Southern England breeding population alone has been estimated at well in excess of 6000 pairs). Information based on figures from the UK and Ireland Red Kite Co-ordination Group and compiled by Doug Simpson MBE – Yorkshire Red Kite Co-ordinator.

The BTO BBS report for 2019 showed population increases in England of 6% for 2018 to 2019, 307% from 2008 to 2018 and 21,795% from 1995 to 2018. It records a population estimate of >10,000. The disparity between these two sets of figures is a good indication of the difficulties involved in establishing data such as this. However, a population increase of a colossal 21,795% over the period of 24 years up to 2018 is a clear indication that things are headed in the right direction.

Conservation status

UK: **Green list**. Population increasing.

Global/European and EU regional assessments: **Red list** (Version 3.1, amended 2019).

Near threatened; undergoing a moderately rapid population decline in southern Europe. Most of the data on which assessments are based are 10+ years old. However, it shows declines particularly amongst birds breeding and over-wintering in Spain. It records that birds from northern Europe populations are increasingly over-wintering on their breeding grounds and are generally increasing. (Could this be a beneficial effect of global warming?) It is possible that this trend could eventually reverse the overall decline of the species in Europe and could, if sustained, bring about a down-listing of its protection status. (Source: The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species).

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

National and regional threat assessment

Illegal poisoning remains a considerable threat to Red Kites. Whilst they may not be the intended target, they are scavengers and will consume poisoned baits placed illegally in the open countryside to kill other species.

Kites are also susceptible to poisoning from second-generation rodenticides introduced to control rats which had become resistant to first-generation substances such as Warfarin and Coumatetralyl. The results of toxicological tests, on kites which are suspected of having been poisoned, regularly show background levels of at least three, sometimes four, rodenticides – an indication of their widespread presence in the countryside. This strongly suggests that the guidelines for the proper use of these poisons are not being followed and that, in consequence, they are getting into the food chains of scavenging species. On occasion, the levels detected are of more significance and there have been 16 recorded Yorkshire deaths from this cause since 2007. Several of these deaths have coincided with areas in which pheasants have been released, the food provided for them in the form of grain having attracted numbers of rats. Controlling them through the use of rodenticide poses an obvious risk to kites and other scavenging species.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored throughout season to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
FoRK	70+	44	NC	NC	23	23	21	19	33	1.43	1.43
SPRSG	5	5	NC	NC	5	5	5	5	7	1.4	1.4
TOTAL	75+	49	NC	NC	28	28	26	24	40	1.43	1.43

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

Occasional birds are seen over the fells, but this species has still not managed to successfully settle to breed in Bowland. There is abundant suitable habitat, so it is likely that persecution linked to game bird shooting that is preventing them from breeding.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Whilst breeding Red Kites remain absent from the Calderdale study area the number of local sightings continues to increase year on year. During 2019 the Group received 42 records from 28 separate locations. They were received in every month of the year except January and December.

Most of the sightings were of single birds; however, there were also 2 sightings of pairs and one sighting of three adult birds together. There is ample suitable habitat for breeding Red Kites in Calderdale and it can only be a matter of time before a pair settles and breeds in the study area.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group.

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

A scarce visitor. No comprehensive monitoring, records seem to emanate from single birds passing through the county, most of which emanate from the south of the county, possibly birds coming from Shropshire.

Friends of Red Kites (FoRK)

Extent of coverage: Tyne & Wear, County Durham and Northumberland

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

All reports from Durham Upland Bird Study Group and Northumbria Ringing Group are now presented under the FoRK report as set out below.

Yes - Red Kite is a black hole species. Although there were no reported incidents of Red Kite persecution in 2019 the species has been retained as a black hole species as there is documented evidence of illegal persecution having taken place in the last five years. There are still concerns about population increase and distribution. There have been a minimum of 229 chicks known to have fledged between 2012 and 2019 (inclusive) of which **72** were - tagged. There has not been a corresponding increase in the number of breeding pairs that one would have expected from these numbers, with only a very small number of those youngsters that were wing-tagged being later identified as part of a breeding pair.

Monitoring was carried out in the Durham Uplands, the Derwent Valley (including the core area of Gateshead's Lower Derwent Valley, and the uplands and part lowlands of south west Northumberland and the Tyne Valley.

All home ranges that had held pairs in previous years were monitored. In addition, areas with suitable habitat e.g. Tyne Valley were also surveyed in the early spring. The number of occupied territories, 44, was greater than 2015's record high highest but was only 2 up on 2018. The number of young fledged per incubating females was also higher than last year's figure of 1.26. This was mostly due to there being fewer failures in 2019 than in the previous year. Despite extremes in the weather in the spring and early summer Red Kites have done

better than expected with a minimum of 33 chicks fledging from 19 known successful nests. This is the highest number of fledged youngsters since 2014. Four nests failed; one being predated by crows. The cause of the other failures could not be determined.

Twelve youngsters were ringed in June with 8 of these being suitable to wing-tag. The 2019 colour for the tag on the right wing is blue.

There appears to be a drift of breeding pairs from the lowest part of Gateshead's Derwent Valley, the core area now being centred three kilometres further west in the Derwent Valley. Several territories at the eastern end of the Derwent Valley have been vacated and pairs appear to be re-locating higher up the valley. There is also evidence that pairs are spreading out from the Derwent Valley with an additional 4 breeding pairs in outlying areas, 2 in north west Durham and 2 in south-west Northumberland.

Breakdown of breeding pairs by county:

Northumberland: A total number of 4 successful breeding pairs fledging 8 young (an increase of 2 pairs from 2018)

County Durham and Gateshead MBC (collectively the historic vice - county of Durham): Fifteen pairs successfully fledged 25 chicks.

A tentative sign that the population could be expanding is the increase in the number of Red Kite sightings being recorded from outside the breeding locations over the last 18 months, suggesting birds are exploring new areas.

A co-ordinated roost count in the north east of England on Sunday, 7th January produced the highest roost number of the winter, when 58 birds used 4 different roost sites. The roost check on that evening was part of an International Roost Count carried out at all locations in Europe holding Red Kites. Last year (2018), 57 kites were counted in the north east of England on the corresponding weekend.

Further roosting information for England and Scotland

2019 figures (2018 counts in brackets): There were 823 (637) in Scotland and 945 (550) in England which represents a significant increase in the number of roosting Red Kites. Five out of the 8 youngsters that were wing-tagged have been identified at the winter roosts.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

There were 21 records of passage birds in 2019 (22 in 2018) ranging from February to December. Most involved singles but there were the following records of 2 birds: June 2nd, tracked at 3 locations in the SW of the county; July 26th in the E; Oct 28th in the centre of the county at Heaton Park which split up and went S and SW; Nov 16th at one of the locations seen June 2nd. Still no suggestion of any birds holding a territory.

North York Moors Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

There cannot be any corner of the NYMs that has not recorded this species as a regular wanderer, and it is quite possible it is already breeding in some out of the way spot, perhaps known to a few people who deem it in the bird's best interests to keep quiet about them. No matter what season or month of the year individuals can appear anywhere but to date no reliable information has been received of a displaying pair. However, it surely can only be a matter of time before a nesting attempt is confirmed.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Red Kites continue to increase in their frequency within the study area. Reports of a bird carrying prey in the north of the study area were investigated but no subsequent sightings occurred. Observations in the west of study area suggest that Red Kites are breeding not far outside of the group's study area.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeding species; nests monitored when found.

After last year's first successful breeding in Derbyshire for over 150 years, SPRSG member Ant Messenger reported that at least 4 sites were occupied by breeding pairs in the area south of Carsington Water. Three nests were located and were in Silver Birch, Larch and Scots Pine; at a 4th site the nest was on private land with no agreed access, so the tree species used was not known. All nests were successful and a total of 5 young fledged, giving a mean of 1.25 young per nest.

A further pair of Red Kites nested in an oak tree in well-wooded countryside in the gritstone part of the Peak District National Park, fledging 2 young. This was the 1st proven breeding record for the National Park since at least the 1860s.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

The YDNPA coordinate the monitoring of breeding Raven and Peregrine in the Yorkshire area of the YDNP. No other systematic survey work is undertaken but, any breeding data for raptors and owls that are recorded during other survey work are noted. In addition, casual records are supplied by several independent fieldworkers and are taken from Birdtrack.

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: An unconfirmed report of a breeding pair fledging two young in the northern dales would be the first breeding record in the YDNP since 2010.

Yorkshire

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Moderate coverage of all known breeding areas.

We are grateful to the Yorkshire Red Kite group for the following report.

Breeding: monitoring continued in 2019, albeit that circumstances beyond our control prevented this being as thorough as usual. This resulted in many locations not being checked at all and some only early in the breeding season to confirm occupation of territories. A rough estimate is that around half of potential sites were confirmed as occupied. The table below shows such figures as are available, the bracketed figures being from 2018 when more thorough monitoring was possible.

AREA	TERR. PAIRS	PAIRS BRED	PAIRS SUCC.	YOUNG
West Yorkshire	39 (66)	39 (61)	25 (52)	37 (94)
North Yorkshire	43 (47)	42 (45)	38 (35)	54 (68)
East Yorkshire	7 (11)	7 (11)	6 (11)	9 (17)
Totals	89 (124)	88 (117)	69 (98)	100 (179)

Average young raised per successful pair **1.45**. (in 2018,1.83)

Sightings of Red Kites continued to be reported from an increasingly wide area, showing that the birds are continuing to explore new locations. However, there has still been no confirmation of breeding pairs in the Yorkshire area to the south of Leeds. There had been a steady increase in sightings in the North Nottinghamshire, North Derbyshire and South Yorkshire localities, they having become a regular sight as far north as the Doncaster area. Such reports (including 2 breeding records which were not quite in Yorkshire) have continued and it will surely not be long before kites become a regular and widespread feature in the landscape throughout the county – particularly when this northerly progression reaches areas already populated by birds originating from the Yorkshire release site at Harewood. It is likely that these newcomers are predominantly kites which have spread northwards from the well-established Midlands population, arising from birds released in Northamptonshire in the mid-1990s. Such traffic of Midlands birds northwards is something which has been happening, on a small scale, for a number of years - the occasional tagged Midlands bird having joined the Yorkshire breeding population in the past.

Persecution by poisoning continues to be an issue. Three geographically widespread incidents at Millington, Thixendale and Wath, the 2 latter contributing further to the infamous North Yorkshire tally of victims, showed the continued use of banned pesticides for this illegal purpose. The Wath bird was yet another victim found in the now infamous Nidderdale AONB bird of prey killing zone. The AONB authorities have addressed this issue in their Evidence Report which forms part of its Management Plan for the period 2019 to 2024. The report can be found here: <https://nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/BoP-in-NiddAONB-Evidence-Report-FINAL-Sept-2019.pdf> It is particularly relevant to Red Kites as no fewer than 23 are known to have been either poisoned or shot in the AONB. This is a terrible record – undoubtedly the worst in England for any given area.

Roost counts are held each January and these are usually the cue for either bad weather or windless days. The 2019 count produced a total count of 369 birds spread over 7 locations, the peaks being Harewood (121) and Nunburnholme (107).

East Yorkshire Red Kites

The following information has been submitted by an independent observer.

As in previous years we continue to remain confident about the long-term success of the East Yorkshire Red Kite population. Unfortunately, for various reasons, monitoring to the same level as previously was not achieved – as reflected in the recorded figures.

Sadly, at a location on an estate where we were previously allowed to view a nest, the staff approached and told us ‘circumstances have changed’ and we were asked to leave. On the same estate at another viewing area from the public highway, a double storey of silage bales had been placed on estate land, blocking the view, and further along, the double row of Leylandii they planted at Nunburnholme have reached a height making observing almost impossible.

Kites continue to move off the Wolds and we now receive many sightings from further to the east of the county. More worrying is the increase in sightings from the north of East Yorkshire - birds heading towards the grouse shooting moorland of North Yorkshire.

Of interest is a 20-year-old male kite from the original release programme at Harewood and the 1st pair of released birds we were aware of to breed in East Yorkshire. A fortuitous, very close, sighting enabled part of the number on his leg ring to be read. A bit of detective work showed that it was highly improbable that any other kites with a similar number would have been present in the area, the ring having been fitted in the Chilterns before it was brought up to Yorkshire for release. The bird had been identified at this site from its wing-tags and radio-transmitter in the early days of the project so there was little room for doubt as to his identity. Before finally settling at the East Yorkshire site and assuming family responsibilities, he

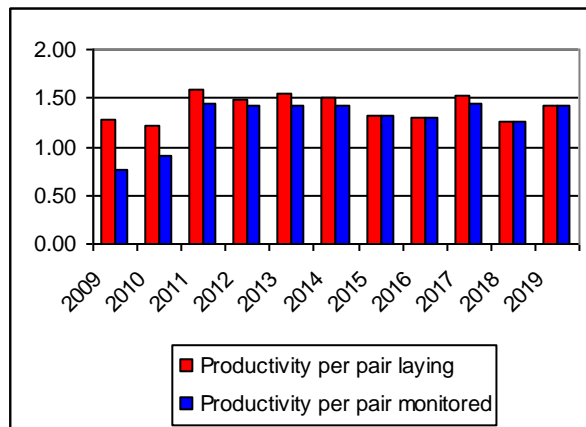
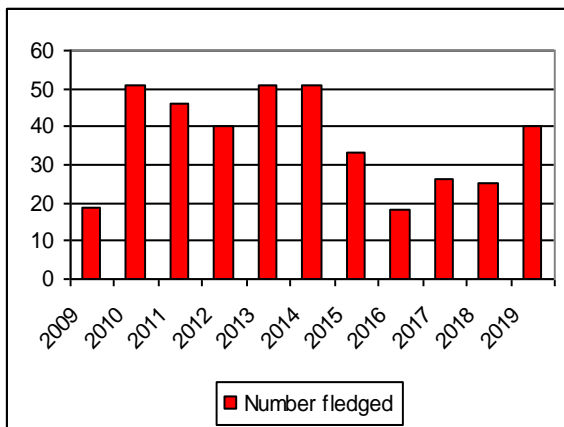
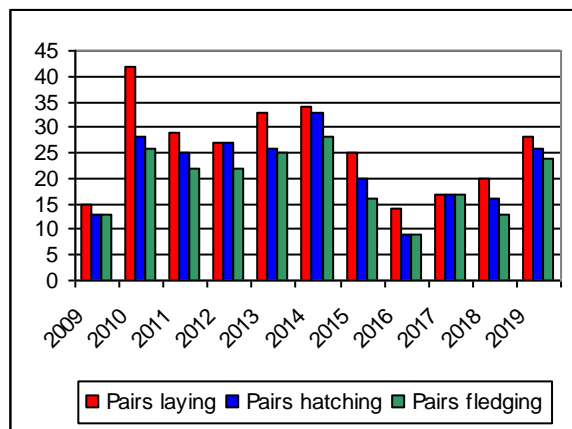
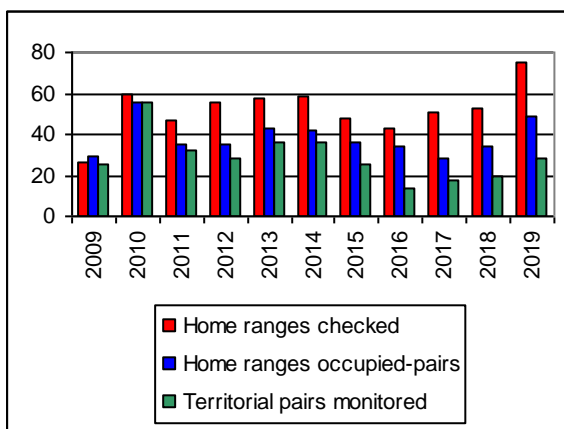
made the trip back to Harewood on a number of occasions. His original mate died in 2014 in mysterious circumstances at the age of 15. This year he and his new mate raised 2 young, taking the total of his offspring to 38.

East Yorkshire is a massive area and we are confident there will have been other breeding pairs that we are not aware of. A maximum of 94 birds were recorded in January 2020 at the communal winter roost site confirming that there are well over 100 birds in the area.

NERF regional summary

Red Kite numbers continue to increase, putting them on the Green list for Conservation Status but it would be nice to see more of an expansion of ranges of breeding birds. However, Red Kites are frequently recorded as passage birds in many study areas.

NERF is grateful to Nigel Puckrin for compiling the above account.



Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*



Martin Loftus

UK population estimate

This is by far the UK's most abundant raptor.

The latest population estimate by the Avian Population Estimate published in February 2020 puts this at 61,500 – 85,000 pairs for GB in 2016. (Woodward I. *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020).

The BTO estimated trends derived from Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) information show continued growth in England since 2016, with an annual increase of 8% over the period 2018-19, 34% 2008-18 and over the 23 years between 1995 and 2018 a very impressive increase of 226% . The expansion of the breeding distribution of Buzzards from west to east is also apparent within the BTO regional data. Increases are evident across all of the areas covered by NERF member groups with the greatest increase noted within the North East region (Cleveland, Durham and Northumberland) which had an estimated increase of 7,095 pairs between 1995 and 2018.

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

Despite the noted increases in population and breeding range of Buzzards the species is still threatened by both natural causes and illegal persecution.

Although Buzzards take a wide variety of prey species, Rabbits are an important component of their diet. BBS mammal data show an alarming downward trend in Rabbit populations due to a new species of Rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RDHV1). First reported in the UK in 1992, it is highly contagious among lagomorphs. BBS mammal monitoring recorded a decline of 64% in Rabbit populations between 1996 and 2018. As an important prey species it is noteworthy that the increase of Buzzards has occurred at the same time as Rabbits are declining. However this expansion has been into largely arable or mixed farmland where Rabbits may be at lower densities, or subject to forms of control, than on open heaths, forest edges and similar habitats.

The longer-term implications for Buzzard populations on moorland and moorland fringes if Rabbit numbers continue to decline are not yet evident but will need to be monitored. The RSPB's Bird Crime Report - published in 2019 but covering the 2018 period - recorded 31 incidents of persecution against Buzzards. The true figure will be much higher, given the difficulties of finding the evidence. North Yorkshire and the Northern Peak District continue to be persecution black spots where incidents involving raptors have made the national news on several occasions. In Northumberland 2 shot Buzzards were found in spring 2019 adjacent to grouse moors and in both cases other raptor persecution incidents had been recorded nearby.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum number fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	6	6	0	0	6	5	5	5	7	1.40	1.17
ChRSG	33	29	7	3	13	12	11	11	11	1.09	0.84
DUBSG	42	42	NC	NC	6	6	6	6	10	1.66	1.66
MRG	21	21	NC	NC	18	18	8	8	23	1.28	1.28
NRG	156	141	7	0	80	59	59	59	66	1.12	0.82
NYMUBSG	4	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
PDRMG	59	44	NC	10	31	25	18	18	29	1.16	0.94
SPRSG	9	9	NC	NC	9	8	5	5	8	1.00	0.88
TOTAL	330	296	14	13	164	133	112	112	154	1.16*	0.94*

*averages across those groups where the outcomes were known

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

This species now occurs more commonly than in previous decades in Bowland, particularly in the farmland areas, due to the large number of woods and copses. However, some pairs that nest in upland areas regularly fail for unexplained reasons, believed to be most likely due to persecution linked to driven grouse shooting. Birds with wing damage suggestive of shotguns are seen occasionally.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Large areas of Calderdale consist of suitable Buzzard habitat. Unfortunately the lack of resources within the Study Group means that the amount of time available for surveying and monitoring the species is constrained. Throughout the year 457 records were received from all parts of the study area; this is a slight reduction of 10% over the previous year. This reduction is attributable to a decrease in observer hours rather than a fall in the number of birds in the area, which have been increasing year on year since 2016. During 2019 the Group located 5 pairs that are known to have fledged young. The number of young known to have fledged was obtained when they were counted as family parties. Taking into account the number of sightings recorded it is highly likely that the area contained several other successful pairs that went unrecorded.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County

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

First-year tagged birds were noted in Betws-y-Coed and Ruthin – the latter was recovered shot. However, this demonstrates the movement of 1st year pre-breeding birds.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

Although not a priority species for monitoring, a slight increase was recorded in the occupied home ranges, up from 37 in 2018 to 42 but this remains well below what the study area could and should carry. Six pairs are known to have fledged 10 young but the actual total fledged would be well above this, as only a small percentage of breeding pairs are monitored.

The productivity of 1.66 young also represents an increase from 1.55 young recorded in 2018.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Despite this species' abundance, records of confirmed breeding were comparatively few, and precise numbers of fledged young even fewer, hardly surprising as Buzzards are highly secretive when nesting and require a great deal of time and effort by observers to elicit this information - commodities not available in the breeding season.

Six nests were known to have fledged at least one young, 5 in the Wigan MBC area (one fledged 3) and one in Littleborough (Rochdale). One of these nests was on the mosslands, where 10 further nests were located by David Steel but their contents could not be ascertained. An 11th nest was also strongly suspected there, and nests were also found at Over Hulton and Pilsworth.

Display was noted in spring in 8 areas, with 12 counted in the Astley Moss area 15th March. Family parties flying together in August are also another indication of successful breeding, and such groups were seen at the Abram Flashes, Rumworth Lodge, Over Hulton, Ludworth Moor, Bickershaw and Tyldesley.

The usual autumn migration was noted over the Winter Hill area in September with 37 moving south on the 7th, 26 on 8th, 32 on 13th (maximum together, a spiral of 15), 42 on 23rd and 11 on 26th. Nineteen were counted on Little Woolden Moss on 13th September.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

Once again, data was received from the 4 study areas in the County; overall breeding was poor linked to the downturn in the vole population this year.

Kielder Border Forest: 40 nests were found, from which 22 nests fledged 24 chicks. In this study area nests are recorded either as fledged or failed - it is not recorded at which stage they have failed.

South Cheviots/MOD Otterburn: 60 occupied home ranges were found (as in 2017 and 2018), within which 30 nests each fledged a single chick. Nine of the total nests were on the 261 sq. km. Otterburn MOD Training Area.

North Cheviots: At least 31 home ranges were occupied but none was followed up.

Slaley Forest: 10 home ranges were occupied, and 10 nests were found, 7 of which fledged 12 chicks. This was the best year for occupation since the start of the study in 2014. A pair reoccupied a vacant home range and the nest was found in an area of the forest used for paint balling. Unfortunately the nest failed with large chicks after it collapsed following heavy rain. The NRG also carries out a small study in the Grizedale area of Cumbria. Ten home ranges were checked, 9 were occupied, fledging 13 chicks. It is interesting to note that in the same study area Tawny Owls had a very poor year. In Grizedale, Rabbits are still important prey, unlike Northumberland where Buzzards most commonly eat voles.

North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

The species goes from strength to strength across the North Yorkshire Moors area despite the inherent threat of persecution on grouse moors. As referred to in the Goshawk account, certainly in the forests to the south east of the study area, competition for nesting territory from this species is becoming an increasing problem. Sadly due to manpower limitations any monitoring of Buzzard nests is incidental to the study group's principal work on Merlins. Just one nest was monitored to outcome and this was short lived. An occupied nest with an apparently incubating bird on 2nd May had clearly been abandoned by the time of the next visit in June. Persecution may have been involved but there was no evidence to suggest this was the case and natural causes may just as well have been responsible for the failure.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

The population continues to increase within the study area but the inclement weather is believed to have affected both the success rate and brood sizes.

A Common Buzzard was found dead near to a suspected poisoned bait in the Longdendale Valley area; toxicological tests revealed that the bird had died due to poisoning by Alphachloralose.

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 and is well established across the whole of the study area. In the wider Upper Derwent Valley area 9 pairs were recorded as breeding, of which 3 pairs failed at the egg stage and one failed pre-laying; the remaining 5 pairs fledged a total of 8 young

NERF regional summary

Within the areas covered by the NERF, the populations and ranges of Common Buzzards continue to increase. However, in most areas the carrying capacity still exceeds the growths that have taken place.

Persecution still plays a part in suppressing further growth despite increasing publicity being given to the incidents which are recorded. Clearly the perpetrators have little or no regard for the legal protection given to birds of prey.

The number of home ranges occupied in 2019 increased to 296 from 274 in 2018. However the total number of known fledged young at 154 was a decrease from the record high of 184 last year; the largest falls occurring in the Northumbria and Peak District study areas, where respectively reduced Vole numbers and poor weather were considered to be a factors in the declines.

The figure for young fledged per pair laying (average 1.16) and per territorial pair monitored (average 0.94) were also generally down from 2019, although local increases in productivity levels were recorded by the Calderdale, Durham and Manchester groups.

Low levels of monitoring continue to be the case in many study areas as groups prioritise other species.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*



Pat Killelea

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. Woodward, I. *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020 gives a tentative estimate of 4000 -14000 based on BBS and 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.

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
BRSR	36	13	8	0	13	13	13	13	44	3.38	1.67
CaRSG	28	15	13	NC	6	6	6	3	7	1.66	1.66
ChRSG	900	172	11	4	172	172	172	167	402	2.33	2.33
MRG	138	68	5	2	63	62	62	58	228	3.68	3.62
NRG	237	92	6	2	90	80	71	68	193	2.41	2.14
PDRSG	5	4	NC	NC	3	3	3	3	10	3.33	3.33
SPRSG	7	6	1	NC	6	6	6	6	14	2.33	2.33
NYMUBSG	42	25	1	0	23	25	23	23	81	3.24	3.52
TOTAL	1393	395	45	8	376	367	356	341	979	2.67	2.60

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 due to the human environment.

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.

2019 was a poor year for Barn Owls in Bowland, mainly due to very low occupancy. This could possibly have been a result of a poor year in 2018 when productivity was low and many just-fledged juveniles died in their natal barns. Productivity for those pairs that did breed in 2019 was fairly good, which will hopefully result in increased numbers in 2020.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

The Barn Owl population in Calderdale continues to expand, albeit slowly. A total of 187 records were received throughout the year and 15 territories were found to be occupied at the start of the breeding season. Unfortunately, the vole crash in early summer, which had had a serious detrimental impact on other vole-dependent species, severely reduced the number of successful pairs from a potential 15 to just 3. One pair fledged 4 young, a 5th chick died and was 'recycled'. A 2nd pair nested in a stack of hay bales; this pair only fledged a single chick. At the 3rd site 2 young birds were observed with the adults shortly after fledging.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Cheshire Barn Owl groups have been in operation for over 20 years and the Barn Owl population has stabilised at between 150 pairs and 190 pairs. The breeding output is very dependent on weather and the cyclic nature of prey populations; however, even in poor years (2015) Cheshire held 102 pairs and fledged 211 young. This allows a fast recovery from dips in breeding performance. 2019 was an average year, with some notable fledgling losses due to overheating in exposed nest boxes.

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.

Following 2018 which had seen an obvious increase in breeding pairs in upland locations, subjectively 2019 brought a return to lower and more typical population levels and less was seen of hunting birds in autumn and winter in these areas. It is thought that low vole numbers accounted for the overall reduction.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

2019 was an exceptional year with all records broken! The very warm February probably helped the vole population to breed early, thus bringing females into breeding condition. The number of sites occupied at 68 is well in excess of previous years (47, 41 and 24 sites in 2018 to 2016 respectively), but the additional boxes erected during recent years makes a true comparison difficult. More telling perhaps was the average number of young per site, with 3.62 a welcome rise from 2.33, 3.00 and 2.92 in 2018 to 2016 respectively. There were also 9 2nd broods, far in excess of normal years when only one pair, which receives supplementary feeding all year, regularly double-broods. 150 birds were ringed this year. A farm on the Rochdale moors, one of whose chicks of the year was found alive in south Devon in late 2018, repeated the feat with a chick ringed in June 2019 recovered in Sittingbourne, Kent (sadly dead) in February 2020.

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 coverage was particularly good again with a large number of boxes checked in both the uplands and lowlands. 2019 was an improvement on last year with 92 nests (85 in 2018) fledging 193 chicks (153 in 2018).

On the Otterburn Training area the 10 nests all fledged, contrasting with Holy Island where both pairs failed. In another small area 5 nests fledged only 11 chicks.

A chick ringed in the South Cheviots was recovered in Scotland, near Stirling - a movement of 163km.

Another recovery of note was a July 2019 chick recovered at Newcastle Airport as an aircraft casualty 2 months later.

Once again thanks go to Phil Hanmer for his lowland records.

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.

A reasonable season experienced by these birds, although productivity was down on that of 2018 by about 20%. Fewer nesting pairs were recorded, basically as a result of a proportion of boxes not being checked, but also the majority of broods were fairly small: one nest held one chick, 3 nests 2 chicks, 9 nests 3 chicks; 6 nests 4 chicks and 4 nests 5 chicks. Sixty-two of the chicks were ringed. Due to the passing of Geoff Myers no data have been obtained from the Tees RG nestbox scheme to the west of the study area and on the Tees Plain.

Thankfully, the winter was relatively mild and few weather-related recoveries have surfaced. The breeding population appears to be in a fairly healthy position for the 2020 season.

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.

Four broods were ringed on the Chatsworth Estate by member Stephen Moores; a total of 12 young fledged (4, 3, 3, 2). Pairs were successful at Brimington and Unstone, whilst the pair at last year's site near Farley, monitored by member Ken Smith, did not appear in 2019 and only one bird was seen to be present.

Yorkshire Dales Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

A species that appears to be doing well in the Dales. Although it is almost certainly an under-estimate of the true population, from the records received it was possible to attribute these to 5 probable, 5 possible and 8 confirmed breeding pairs.

NERF regional summary

Overall, 2019 followed on 2018 as a good year in terms of Barn Owl productivity across the NERF recording range. Again, the birds at lowland farmland areas seem to be more successful than the pairs in the higher altitudes, this may be linked to weather and temperature factors influencing timing of breeding rather than prey and nest site availability. Vole population crashes appear to have occurred at the local level rather than across the board regionally.

Movements of owls submitted from ringing data tended to show short movements typically under 10km.

Barn Owl Trust Overview

The Barn Owl Trust's annual publication *State of the UK Barn Owl population*, based on returns from 40 Barn Owl Groups all over the country, states that in 2019 overall nesting occupancy was a fairly impressive 21% higher than the all-years average. This was due in part to the warm, dry and sunny February which allowed females to attain breeding weight. However, this was followed by a very wet March, and dry weather in April and May, inhibiting vegetation growth, which may have affected the vole population in some parts of the country.

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*



Ivan Ellison

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. RBBP's 2018 report on non-native species (2020, *in press*) states that 3 pairs were found, of which 2 bred.

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. Based on figures supplied by the Independent Bird Register and numbers registered under a CITES Article 10 certificate, it was estimated in 2008 that an average of 65 captive birds escape annually – many of these are not recaptured or relocated. 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 to known outcome	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	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

Birds were heard calling early in the year, but no evidence was found of nesting attempts having taken place. Concerns around persecution and disturbance remain.

All other groups reported nil sightings.

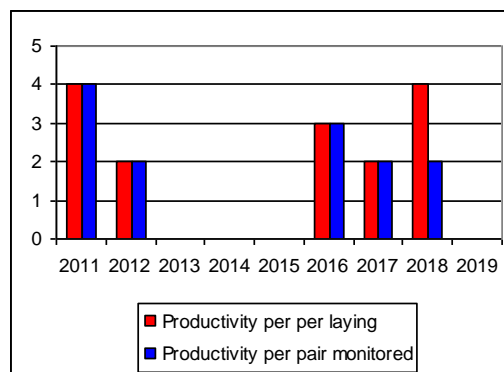
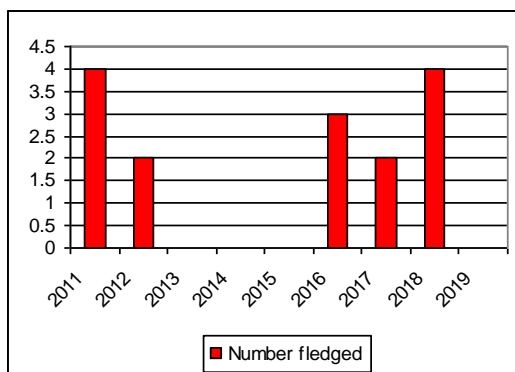
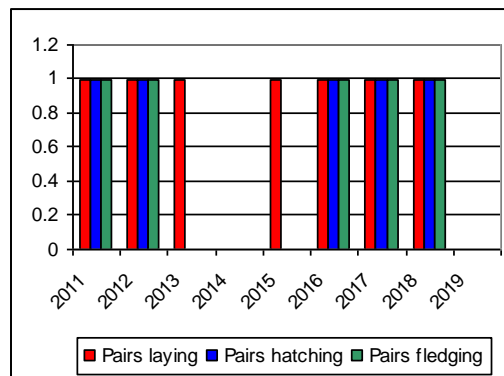
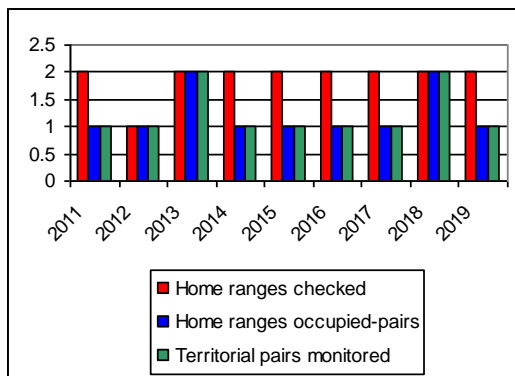
NERF regional summary

2019 was a blank year. This followed 3 years of successful nesting, but prior to that there was no breeding 2013 to 2015.

There were no records of breeding by Eagle Owls from any other regional study area either despite suitable habitat in forests such as Kielder. A pair has been breeding, or attempting to breed, at the Bowland site for 13 years and a change of female occurred in 2012. However, given the secretive nature of the species and remoteness of habitat, pairs can easily be overlooked. This could also apply to other study areas. Persecution and disturbance are the main reasons for failure for this species.

It is likely that some captive birds are deliberately released into the wild by owners who find them too expensive to keep. A birds of prey centre known to the Editor reported recently that it received several requests to re-home birds but found difficulty in doing so.

Comparative data 2009-2019



Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*



Chris Sutton

UK population estimate

In 2020 the population was estimated at 50000 pairs (Woodward *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: British Birds 113, February 2020). 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 2019 gives a 5% decline 2018-19, a 2% increase 2008-18 and a 27% decrease 1995 to 2018 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 almost a third over the last two and a half decades. 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. Birds also feature as prey during the nesting season, when early passerine fledglings – particularly thrush species – can be heavily predated.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home ranges occupied (pairs)	Homes ranges occupied (singles)	Pairs failing early / non breeding	Territorial pairs monitored	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known Pairs hatching eggs	Known Pairs fledging young	Known Number fledged	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	9	4	5	NC	4	4	3	3	4	1.00	1.00
MRG	68	37	NC	NC	37	37	32	32	50	1.35	1.35
NRG	374	88	0	5	83	83	71	66	109	1.31	1.31
NYMUBSG	27	6	NC	NC	6	6	6	6	13	2.17	2.17
PDRMG	6	4	NC	NC	4	4	4	4	9	2.25	2.25
TOTAL	484	139	5	5	134	134	116	111	185	1.38	1.38

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Occurs as a regular breeding species but no monitoring takes place. This appears to be a common breeding species in Bowland but no systematic monitoring takes place.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

In common with all of the species that depend upon voles as their main prey item in Calderdale, Tawny Owls suffered badly during 2019. There were 50 individual sightings of birds during the year. Unfortunately these sightings did not all refer to breeding attempts. Only 4 pairs were proven to have laid eggs with 3 of these collectively raising only 4 young. The 4th pair abandoned a clutch of 4 eggs.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

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

Level of monitoring: Whole County.

A fairly common, thinly distributed resident. There is no comprehensive monitoring of the species. Records originate from across the county but it is a very under-recorded species. Fifteen were ringed, mainly nestlings with nests found in various habitats including, city parks, farmland and forest/wooded areas. A targeted nestbox project has commenced in Delamere Forest and local Council Parks to investigate diet and habitat use.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

No routine monitoring of local populations takes place. The species is widespread in woodlands throughout the upland region with an obviously healthy population in Hamsterley Forest and other larger woodland blocks.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

There was confirmed breeding at 37 sites, with young fledging at 32 of these, producing 50+ young. Eggs were abandoned at 5 locations, and the number of young was unknown at 4 other sites, (assumed to be 1 in the figure of 50+ above). These results were similar to 2018. Peter and Norma Johnson monitored 22 of the 33 sites, finding 31 chicks in 19 boxes (average 1.63 per box). Six of the other confirmed breeding events were found as a result of checking Barn Owl sites, and 2 related to branched young where the original site was not found. Records came from a further 28 sites, and as this owl is very sedentary it is likely that these areas held breeding birds.

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.

2019 was rather a disappointment: 304 sites were checked but with past poor breeding seasons and the vole population at a low ebb, only 81 were occupied eventually fledging 98 chicks, a similar outcome to 2018.

Data were received from across the county with most studies, but not all, having few nesting pairs. As an example, in the study Kielder A, where vole numbers were improving, 24 pairs fledged 37 chicks: in the Kielder B study, 10 pairs fledged 12 chicks; the 2nd poorest year since the study began.

It was very encouraging to have received data from 9 studies in the county, schemes varying in size from 3 to 129 boxes. Eight of these are operated by Group members. Thanks are also due to Phil Hanmer for the use of his data.

The figures in the table represent combined data from Northumberland and the Cumbria studies. The latter experienced a very poor year with only 7 of 70 boxes checked being occupied, from which just 11 chicks fledged.

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 in the above table refer only to the results accruing from the South Cleveland RG nestbox operation. Due to the sad and untimely death of Geoff Myers last year no data have been available from the box scheme he ran to the west of the moors. Returns from the SCRG boxes were to say the least meagre – more so than usual. It is puzzling considering the Barn Owl boxes produced well again this year. However, across the NYMs the species is regarded as fairly common and giving little cause for concern. One could in fact be forgiven for interpreting the data in the following table as implying a significant improvement in the fortunes of the species in the NYMs over the 3 year period 2017-19 with the figures for ‘successful nests’ and ‘young ringed’ either already equivalent, or almost so, to those for the previous 5 year period. However, these should be treated with caution as additional nestboxes and re-arrangement of others over the last 3 years may well have created a misleading picture.

**Tawny Owl Annual Productivity Data – North York Moors
Large Nestbox Scheme (South Cleveland RG)**

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	2.38	1.25
1982-86	174	46	26.4	34	72	2.12	1.57
1987-91	169	54	31.9	41	83	2.02	1.54
1992-96	150	33	22.0	29	51	1.76	1.55
1997-01	109	24	22.0	18	32	1.78	1.33
2002-06	128	38	29.7	28	50	1.79	1.32
2007-11	154	44	28.6	40	68	1.70	1.55
2012-16	145	33	22.9	22	39	1.77	1.18
2017-19	88	23	26.1	20	40	2.00	1.74

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Other priorities meant that the majority of known Tawny Owl sites were not monitored in 2019. Six sites were checked and 4 were found to be occupied; these produced 9 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.

This species is not monitored on a regular basis by the SPRSG, but it remains a fairly common breeding resident in the study area.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

This is a widespread but scarce species across the Park.

NERF regional summary

Fortunes seem to have fluctuated across the region for this species in 2019. One cannot over-emphasise the importance of vole numbers to owl species. When they are high, owls breed well, but when they are at the bottom of their 3-4 year cycle, birds may not breed at all. Clearly vole populations will not peak and trough uniformly across the NERF area and it is understandable that breeding season summaries from the various Groups are accordingly going to vary in respect of breeding success. However, it is a pity that monitoring schemes are not operating everywhere. Were they to be, a much clearer picture of the regional status of Tawny Owls would be obtainable. As things stand, returns from those Groups that do operate nest box studies reveal Manchester birds had a good season, whereas pairs in Northumberland, Cumbria, Calderdale and the North York Moors fared either poorly or very

moderately. Nonetheless, it seems the general view from Groups is that the Tawny Owl situation is not one to cause concern at present.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*



Chris Sutton

UK population estimate

The current estimate is 3600 pairs (summer) as at 2016 (Woodward I. *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020). This compares with 7000 to 14000 at the time of the 1968-72 BTO Atlas.

The 2019 BBS report shows a 33% increase 2018-19 and a 61% decrease 1995-2018. Similarly in mainland Europe the decline of the Little Owl has resulted in its listing as a Species of European Conservation Concern.

Conservation status

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

National and regional threat assessment

The 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 Bird Trends). 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. Genetic problems may also play a part in the decline of this species, which emanates from 3 introduction programmes in the 19th century (Waterson - 1841-1842 in Yorkshire, Meade Waltho 1874 -1880 in Kent and Lord Lilford 1888-1895 Northamptonshire). Given the numbers and origin (Netherlands) of the Lilford birds it was considered that this was the most successful introduction; other previous birds originated from Italy and other southern European countries. The sedentary nature of the Little Owl and lack of immigration from the continent has meant that there is a very small gene pool and

during the last 20 years 7 cases of eye problems have been noted in the UK, following research in Switzerland where alpine habitats have limited immigration to established populations.

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 projects. These include 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, 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 (pairs)	Homes ranges occupied (singles)	Pairs failing early / non breeding	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaRSG	19	5	14	NC	3	3	2	2	4	1.33	1.33
ChRSG	6	6	10	4	6	6	6	6	12*	2.00	2.00
MRG	20	20	3	2	8	8	8	8	14*	2.33	2.33
NRG	6	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
NYMUBSG	5	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
SPRSG	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	3.00	3.00
TOTAL	57	34	27	6	19	20	19	19	37	1.85	1.95

*UNDERSTATED FIGURE – assumes a minimum of 1 young from some successful nests where the precise number of young could not be determined. See respective RSG text for productivity values from any nests with an accurately known number of young

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.

It appears that this species has declined significantly in Bowland, but without systematic monitoring it is unknown how many pairs remain.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Reasonable coverage.

Once again, the lack of prey seriously impacted the breeding success of this species during 2019. The year started promisingly when sightings began to be reported; however, the early reports came to nothing and only 2 pairs were proven to have bred successfully.

Despite the low number of breeding records during 2019; 104 reports were received during the year. If 2020 proves to be a 'good vole year' then this low productivity may be reversed.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Uncommon, thinly distributed resident, declining. Nestbox programme started by the group and Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Level of monitoring: Low number of nests monitored, with just 6 sites producing young. An interesting nest in a pile of rubble near to a barn conversion raised 3 young. It is unknown whether the birds were displaced by the barn conversion, this behaviour has been recorded in the arable areas in southern Europe whereas its common for the owls to nest in piles of stones cleared from the arable fields before ploughing.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

There are no systematic studies monitoring the species. Little Owls do occur in small numbers in the uplands, principally along the river valleys up to about 350 metres above sea level. Subjectively the species does appear to be in decline, and this is also true for lowland Durham where its numbers in its favoured arable farm landscapes appear to have reduced over the last 5-10 years.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

There was a notable decline in records this year, with only 41 from 21 locations (29 locations in 2018 and 33 in 2017). This is in line with national trends.

As has been noted before, the two cold winters at each end of 2010 also had a disastrous effect on this species locally.

Breeding was confirmed at 8 sites, with 3 of 4 young being ringed at one site and one at another; and in the south-east of the county, 4 chicks fledged at a site new to us. At 3 sites, landowners or observers reported that at least one young had been seen, and at another regular site a chick had been taken into care briefly but returned to the nest site. Three pairs were present at a moorland reservoir, but 2 of these pairs were disturbed by essential repair work; the remaining pair fledged at least one young. Birds were noted on territory throughout the year at 10 further locations but no breeding information was forthcoming. One member reported that where he used to see 5-6 pairs on a regular patch, in 2019 he had only one sighting.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

A very poor year, with the only data coming from a small study area in SE Northumberland. Out of the 6 boxes, only one pair nested, fledging 2 young.

North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Extent of coverage: Occurs as a regular breeding species but no monitoring takes place.

Level of monitoring: This is not a species that receives any dedicated attention from Merlin Group members. It is regarded as thinly spread throughout the study area basically favouring moorland edge and coastal fringe habitats. It is much more at home and occurs at greater density on the Tees plain to the NW and farmland south of there. Just the one nest found late in the season produced the above data. Some other brood members were probably overlooked.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Occurs as a breeding species, but not monitored due to other priorities. The species is not monitored on a regular basis by the group, but it remains a fairly common resident within the area. The regular pair at Ashford in the Water is the only breeding pair noted; three young fledged from this site.

NERF regional summary

The Little Owl tends to be a species recorded as a by-product of efforts to record other species throughout the fieldwork efforts of NERF member groups. This owl's preference is for lowland, open arable habitat with old trees, mature hedgerows or farm outbuildings. However, dry stone walls, grouse butts and rabbit holes in the uplands can often provide nest sites or, as noted this year, coarse rubble heaps. The species can be found in the NERF recording area at lower elevations though not at any great density, although the records from Durham suggest any upland barn or refuge should be checked if time allows.

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, although slightly lower than 2018. As a small bird it is likely to be more susceptible to external factors such as availability of nest sites, food and subject to severe weather affects.

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

The continued decline of this much-loved species is a cause for concern. Because it is an introduced (non-native) species it is not a priority for a national survey, which is a pity because there may be factors unique to this species of owl whose importance is not yet fully understood.

The Editor acknowledges the help given by Roy Leigh of the Cheshire RSG in the compilation of this account.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*



David Steel

UK population estimate

The latest population estimate is 1800-6000 pairs (Woodward I. *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020). It is certainly under-recorded, because of the wide range of habitat 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. 227-295 pairs were reported to RBBP in 2018. (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2020, *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 early or non-breeding	Territorial pairs monitored known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
CaSG	11	4	3	NC	4	4	3	3	6	1.50	1.50
MRG	9	9	0	0	9	9	8	8	15	1.66	1.66
NRG	20	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PDRMG	10	0	NC	NC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NYM	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	55	15	3	2	13	13	11	11	21	1.62	1.62

**UNDERSTATED FIGURE – assumes a minimum of 1 young from some successful nests where the precise number of young could not be determined. See respective RSG text for productivity values from any nests with an accurately known number of young*

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.

This species is not systematically monitored in Bowland, and no evidence of breeding was reported in Bowland in 2019.

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.

2018 was a bumper year for this species and the Group recorded a minimum number of 37 chicks fledged from fourteen pairs. This success was not to be repeated in 2019 when the productivity collapsed by 83.8%. In common with other species that rely on voles as their primary prey species Long-eared Owls were affected by the vole crash.

Whilst 29 records were received only 3 of the 4 occupied territories produced young. The average number of young fledging, per pair laying was 1.5, disappointing when the average clutch size was 3-4.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County

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

More targeted work is planned by the group in future years. Wintering birds were noted on the Mersey estuary and Frodsham. Small winter roosts occur within thick hawthorn growth across the county.

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 DUBSG does not undertake any monitoring of Long-eared Owl. The species breeds in small numbers in plantations and wooded areas. Long-eared Owls are present year-round in some of the larger forestry areas. Most Durham BC records, including winter roosts, come from the east of the county.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County

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

A population in the east of the county (containing 5 active nests) was monitored by Bob Kenworthy and Connor Rand. The clutch/brood size and productivity were low with 2, 1, 1 and 2 young recorded fledged at 4 of these nests. The outcome of the 5th nest was unknown.

Two pairs in the south-east monitored by David Walsh fledged at least 2 young each. At a separate nest in the east, 3 young were heard hunger-calling in July.

In the west of the county, just one nest was found this year, with 2 young.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

Long-eared owls appear to have decreased considerably in Kielder Border Forest over the last 10 years. The average numbers of Home Ranges located historically were between 6 and 10 per year but are now between 2 and 5.

The rise in the Goshawk population, the poor weather in May/June and the felling of large areas of forest are some of the possible constraints on the breeding population. It is thought that the latter should improve habitat for the birds.

2019 was a very poor vole year so it came as no surprise that Long-eared owls were scarce. Just 2 occupied Home Ranges were identified, and neither pair appeared to lay eggs. It is also noteworthy that 2019 was second worst year for Tawny Owls in 40 years.

No birds were found predated by Goshawks in 2019 and no records were received from other group members.

North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeding species; nests monitored when found.

Although the number of Home Ranges checked is listed as 5, group members make a point of checking out areas where nests have previously been encountered whilst engaged in forest work. This search method rarely meets with success and supports the group members' opinion, that the species is distributed across the study area at a low density.

Teasmouth Bird Club records contain a report of owlets heard calling in early August in Guisborough Forest on the western fringe of the North Yorkshire Moors, an area not covered by Merlin Group members. As with several other species in the North Yorkshire Moors our knowledge of the status of this owl would benefit significantly from a dedicated survey of the species.

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.

The group usually locate breeding Long-eared Owl early in the breeding season, as other commitments monitoring 'key species' make finding the resources to search for evidence later in the season difficult. In 2019 there was very little evidence of occupation at historic sites during the early part of the season. However, there were indications that some pairs may have bred later in the year; unfortunately time constraints meant that very little monitoring was undertaken.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

One pair fledged 3 young at a traditional site within the study area, 2 of the young were ringed. There was no further monitoring of this species by members of SPRSG during the 2019 season.

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 low-profile behaviour of the species and a lack of manpower.

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

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*



David Raw

UK population estimate

The UK population of the Short-eared Owl experiences significant annual variation, though accurate data is typically lacking. The UK breeding population lies within what is a broad range of 620-2200 pairs, (Woodward *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020), reflecting the species' scarcity, its population fluctuations and the challenges of accurately surveying birds in their mainly remote upland core breeding areas. Overall, a long-term decline in the breeding population has been apparent, (BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11), and the species is now assessed by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Nationally, the number of breeding pairs is under-recorded with 'confirmed' or 'total possible' breeding pairs shown in the latest RBBP at 94-176 pairs respectively. (Eaton, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2018. 2020, *in press.*)

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 September 2017), with a reported 60% reduction in range.

National and regional threat assessment

The challenges of surveying this species make any accurate assessment of local populations and the threats they face quite problematic. However many NERF member groups provide a widespread and largely consistent monitoring effort of suitable habitat each year for this and other species which allows a simple but meaningful assessment of population trends. The underlying reasons explaining apparent long-term declines remain difficult to discern. Even in good vole years breeding outcomes can be hard to come by and interpret. Late winter and early spring weather conditions may also play a part. Given the national view of the breeding population being vulnerable and in decline, incidents of illegal persecution as reported in NERF's Annual Reviews of 2015 and 2017 are of considerable concern for this emblematic moorland owl.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum known number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSR	15	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
CaRSG	17	13	4	12	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	1.00
ChRSG	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
DUBSG	24	4	3	1	3	3	3	3	4	1.33*	1.33*
MRG	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
NRG	5	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
NYMUBSG	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
PDRMG	14	7	0	1	6	6	5	5	8	1.33	1.33
SPRSG	12	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	6	6.00	6.00
YDNP	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
TOTAL	101	34	9	17	11	11	10	10	19	1.73*	1.73*

*UNDERSTATED FIGURE – assumes a minimum of 1 young from some successful nests where the precise number of young could not be determined. See respective RSG text for productivity values from any nests with an accurately known number of young

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study area. In comparison to the previous year when a good breeding season was reported, 2019 was an especially poor year for this species in Bowland with no evidence of nesting having taken place. It was known to be a poor vole year in the area as confirmed by local Barn Owls struggling to provide for their young and Hen Harriers bringing in very few voles to their nests.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

From what was described locally in 2018 as a ‘vole plague’, the devastating impact of a vole crash throughout Calderdale in the spring of 2019 took its toll on the local Short-eared Owl population. A large number of birds had over-wintered in the study area and seemed to herald an exceptional year as the spring developed with several pairs making display flights. Unfortunately, by May preliminary hopes were dashed when the vole population suddenly crashed. With the exception of just one pair, all breeding attempts had been abandoned and with an outcome of only a single chick fledging, the season inevitably can only be considered as a natural failure.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Known primarily as a scarce winter visitor and migrant, but has bred in the past. More targeted work is being undertaken by the group. Overwintering birds were recorded over the Dee Estuary and there were occasional sightings over Danebower, the Goyt Valley and above Macclesfield Forest but no suggestion of birds settling to breed. Some sightings were noted across the county in the less typical habitat of lowland farmland.

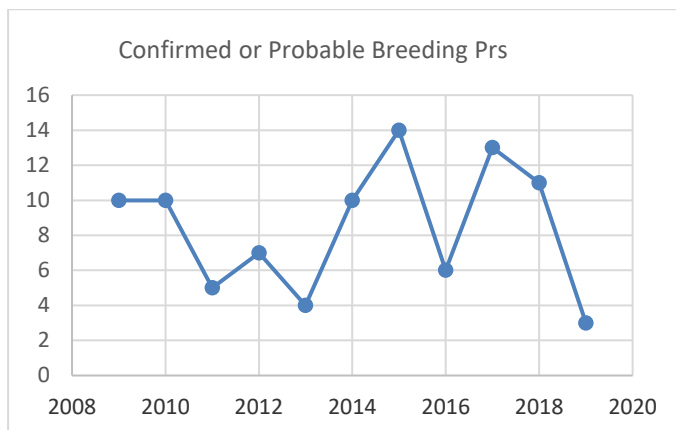
Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Good coverage, several large representative areas are studied annually. Breeding was confirmed at just 3 sites; 2 young were seen at one location and adult behaviour indicated successful breeding at 2 other sites where the exact outcome could not be determined. Overall Short-eared Owls had a very poor breeding season in 2019.

The chart shows the number of confirmed or probable breeding pairs found in the county over the last 11 years. Whilst no claim is made that the figures represent a complete county-wide coverage they do reflect observer effort over a large proportion of the uplands.

Importantly, the coverage is essentially on a ‘constant effort’ basis year-to-year, with the same group members surveying the same areas to the same degree. The variability indicated is probably largely determined by vole numbers in springtime.



Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

Level of monitoring: Breeds very rarely, nests monitored when found.

At a mossland reserve in the west, where this species regularly winters, there was a series of records from 1st May to 26th June and an isolated one on 14th July, but only one bird was

ever seen. This was significant as it is the first time for very many years that a lowland site has recorded a presence in a potential breeding territory.

The same mossland reserve hosted up to 5 overwintering birds, and there were 3 on the moors around Winter Hill in the late winter period.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeding species, nests monitored when found.

As in previous years Short-eared Owls were very scarce in the areas of Northumberland covered by the group. One pair summered on a moor in the Kielder Border Forest but never laid eggs, and in another area a single bird was seen in March but not later.

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 no evidence of breeding anywhere in the study area this season. There were 2 isolated coastal reports of one in May and another in June but both were in unlikely nesting areas. In fact, sightings of birds were at a premium across the year with most occurring at the favoured Liverton/Waupley Moors area and all bar one were winter sightings. Waupley Moor suffered an extensive fire in early spring – presumed arson the cause– which could well have deterred any pair present from nesting there. Fortunately, the habitat had recovered substantially by late autumn.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Upland and part lowland areas.

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

The breeding population of Short-eared Owl in the area was patchy with some 'hotspot' areas. One such area contained 5 nests in a small valley; yet no breeding attempts were recorded in other suitable habitat nearby, with no obvious reason for the disparity. The weather severely impacted the productivity of the known pairs, of the 30+ young recorded in the above valley, less than one third could be proven to have fledged.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland and part lowland areas.

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

The Short-eared Owl has been included as a key target species in the Peak District Bird of Prey Initiative since its inception in 2012 and once again the South Peak District Raptor Study Group covered the Upper Derwent Valley area in conjunction with colleagues in the Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group. In the Upper Derwent Valley area 3 sites were known to be occupied, but the outcomes were unknown.

On the eastern moors a nest with 6 young was monitored in early June, when the young were 2-3 weeks old. In late June an adult bird was found dead near Barbrook Cottage; the bird was sent for x-ray but there were no suspicious circumstances, although there remains suspicion of persecution on some driven grouse moors.

(SPRSG also reported on the North Staffordshire moorlands where 4 sites were found to be occupied during the breeding season but the outcomes at all were unknown)

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas

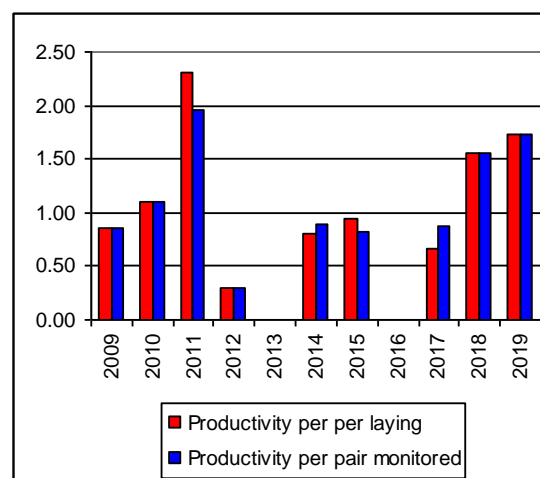
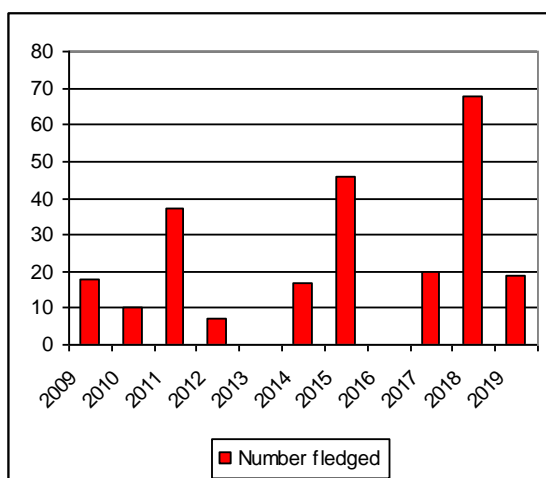
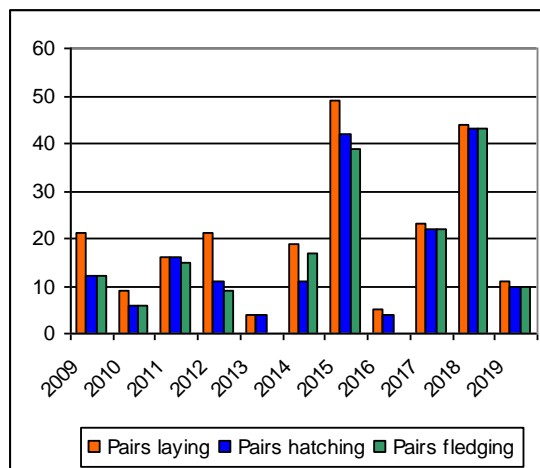
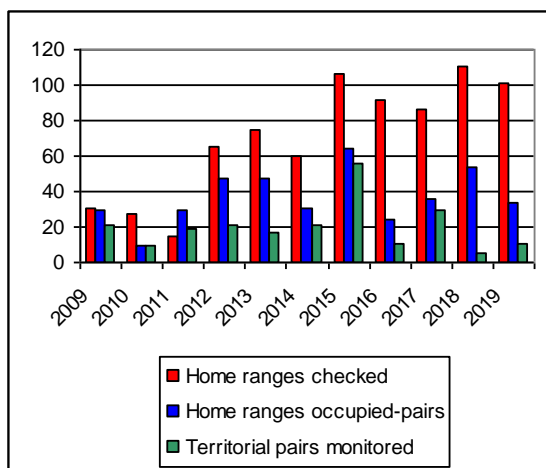
Level of monitoring: Poor coverage, casual monitoring of a few pairs.

There are no systematic monitoring studies undertaken and this year there were no reports of confirmed breeding. Relatively few casual records were received with just three probable pairs noted early in the season.

NERF regional summary

The monitoring of Short-eared Owls presents challenges due to their crepuscular habits in often remote nesting locations which can be in habitat away from where other moorland species are being surveyed. Breeding success is related to the wide annual fluctuations in the populations of Short-tailed Voles and this is amply demonstrated in the vast majority of group reports this year which show a sudden and consistent marked decline from 2018. Overall, the number of sites occupied by pairs and those laying eggs fell dramatically with just 11 nests confirmed and no more than 19 young fledging across all of our total study area, (compare 43 pairs and 68 young in 2018). The enclave of nests found in one valley in the Peak District suggests that even in patently poor vole years there can be some local variation. The species remains scarce and should be classed as ‘vulnerable and threatened’.

Comparative data 2009-2019



Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*



Ken Smith

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, although the Breeding Bird Survey 2019 for England reported a 19% reduction 2018-19 and also 2008-2018, and a 21% reduction in the Kestrel population between 1995 and 2018. 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 Woodward I. *et al.* 2020 (APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020), was 31,000 pairs. Despite these long-term setbacks the Kestrel remains widespread and is 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 fluctuation is linked closely to the availability of prey, largely voles etc., which contributes c.75% of their main 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 UK Government.

However, because many of the NERF member groups do not study this species in detail, the national decline may be being mirrored within the NERF region – yet 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	7	7	0	NC	1	2	1	1	4	2.00	4.00
ChRSG	18	18	NC	2	16	16	16	16	42	2.62	2.62
MRG	26	26	NC	0	26	26	25	25	81*	3.11	3.11
NRG	62	5	16	0	5	4	4	4	12	3.00	2.4
NYMUBSG	25	5	0	0	5	5	5	5	25	5.00	5.00
TOTAL	138	61	16	2	53	53	51	51	164*	3.09	3.09

*UNDERSTATED FIGURE – assumes a minimum of 1 young from some successful nests where the precise number of young could not be determined. See respective RSG text for productivity values from any nests with an accurately known number of young

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

This species is currently not closely monitored in Bowland. However, broods are often found whilst Barn Owl monitoring work is being carried out. It appeared that there were fewer birds around in 2019 than in the previous year.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

2019 was a very poor year for this species in Calderdale. Despite the fact that 382 records, a reduction of 23.6% over 2018, were received, only 2 pairs are known to have attempted to breed. The primary cause of this failure is thought to be related to the crash in the vole population in May. Whilst both of the pairs that were monitored laid eggs, only one pair successfully hatched eggs and went on to fledge 4 young.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

Level of monitoring: Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study. Most nests are found in Barn Owl nestboxes. A planned colour-ringing project is due to commence in 2020.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Occurs as a regular breeding species but no monitoring takes place. No systematic studies of sample populations are conducted. The Kestrel along with Common Buzzard are the 2 most reported raptors by members of the Durham BC. They remain a relatively common sight in upland locations.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

Level of monitoring: Reasonable coverage; at least one long-term monitoring study. A further decline from 30 pairs in 2018 and 45 in 2017. Peter and Norma Johnson's annual study found 6 pairs producing 23 young. In Wigan one nest failed for reasons unknown. Six young fledged at a mossland farm where they, and a pair of Barn Owls, are fed daily. Examination of records submitted to manchesterbirding.com suggested probable breeding at a further 8 sites and possible breeding at 10 more.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Good coverage; at least two long-term monitoring studies.

Data was received from 4 areas in the County, mostly upland where the population is in steep decline. The vole population was very poor throughout 2019, so it was no surprise that Kestrel records were reduced, with only 5 nests fledging a total of 12 chicks.

In the South Cheviots / MOD Otterburn, where the main study area is located, there are 50 known home ranges; in 2019 only one was occupied by a pair, whilst another 16 home ranges were held by single birds only.

In the Kielder Border Forest only 2 nests were known, each fledging only a single chick; in contrast, the 2 nests on low ground fledged broods of 4.

Away from the uplands of Northumberland the Kestrel seems to be holding its own and the species is not uncommon: further survey work is a priority.

North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

A satisfactory return although not as heartening as that for 2018. At least those pairs which did nest all produced good brood sizes. This South Cleveland RG box scheme basically only covers part of the northern and eastern segments of the study area. If the scheme is representative of the species' fortunes across the NYMs then one could reasonably assume this falcon also had a decent season elsewhere. Encouragingly, the 3 years 2017/19 have already produced more young than the 5 year period 2012/16. Hopefully, this upward trend will continue.

**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	4.00	3.20
1982-86	174	12	6.9	11	53	4.82	4.42
1987-91	169	22	13	21	90	4.28	4.09
1992-96	150	20	13.3	19	83	4.37	4.15
1997-2001	109	17	15.6	16	68	4.25	4.00
2002-06	128	19	14.8	15	62	4.13	3.26
2007-11	127	21	16.5	19	84	4.42	4.00
2012-16	120	18	15	12	49	4.08	2.72
2017-19	76	16	21.1	16	68	4.25	4.25

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

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

No widespread monitoring took place in 2019 but the group accepts that possible future study is warranted. A full UK survey would be of benefit to this species, to give an accurate estimate of their current population status. Pairs bred or attempted breeding on several of the millstone edges of the White Peak.

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 member Groups in future years.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*



Colin Dilcock

UK population estimate

The UK population estimate from the last national survey of this species in 2008, (Ewing, S.R. *et al.* 2011 Breeding status of the Merlin in the UK in 2008. *Bird Study* 58:379-389), 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%.

Woodward *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020 estimated the population to be 1150 (890-1450) pairs, based on Ewing *et al.*

Eaton, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2018 (*in press*, 2020) recorded 273-371 pairs monitored.

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 2nd 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. If still practised anywhere it can only be done so out of pure spite! Keepers are well aware these birds do not present any problems for them in regard to predation of young grouse and most are on the whole, happy to tolerate nesting pairs on their moors. Currently absorption of toxic contaminants in the environment via prey consumption is potentially a 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 is 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 featuring factor at wintering areas with birds failing to achieve pre-season breeding condition and subsequently not attempting to nest when back on breeding territories. Another 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.

In light of the predictions from scientific circles that extreme weather events are likely to become the norm in future the probability of wildfires occurring with increasing frequency on tinder-dry moors is also cause for real concern not just for Merlins, but for all upland ground-nesting species.

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 can affect population levels adversely. However, 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 (pairs)	Homes ranges occupied (singles)	Pairs failing early / non breeding	Territorial pairs monitored	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known Pairs hatching eggs	Known Pairs fledging young	Known Number fledged	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSG	25	13	0	3	13	10	9	7	21	2.10	1.62
CaRSG	5	5	0	1	2	2	2	2	5	2.50	2.50
DUBSG	82	47	1	2	44	44	43	40	119	2.70	2.70
NRG	76	29	3	3	23+	23	21	17	50	2.17	2.17
NYMUBSG	38	13	0	0	10	10	10	10	32	3.20	3.20
PDRMG	34	14	3	3	13	13	10	10	37	2.85	2.85
SPRSG	10	2	0	1	2	1	1	1	4	4.00	2.00
TOTAL	270	123	7	13	107+	103	96	87	268	2.60	2.51

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

2019 was another mixed year for this species in Bowland. Several pairs set up territories but did not go on to breed. It is thought that the reason that some of the pairs failed to nest was due to a large amount of heather dying off from a combination of very dry weather and Heather Beetle infestation in 2018, so it will be interesting to see how this species fares in subsequent years.

Densities on the areas of Bowland that are intensively managed for grouse shooting remain much lower than in the past. It is likely that the Merlin population in Bowland is well below the level that gained it Special Protection Area status.

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

During 2019 a total of 71 records were received from 10 discrete sites spread throughout every month. Successful breeding is known to have taken place at 2 sites from where 3 and 2 young were fledged respectively. Gamekeepers on an estate in the west of the study area also reported 2 successful sites. However, these were not independently verified and are not included in this report.

A 5th pair was known to occupy a breeding territory at the beginning of the season. However, it was evident from subsequent observations that the pair did not attempt to breed in the area and the birds dispersed early.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

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

Level of monitoring: Whole County.

A very scarce resident. No breeding information, occasional records above Macclesfield Forest area in the autumn and early spring period. The Dee and Mersey estuaries attract numerous sightings during the winter. Single birds occur at well-watched sites across the county outside the breeding season.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

Near complete coverage of traditional sites was achieved. The number of pairs laying and the total number of young fledged remain at about the high average of values recorded in recent years. Outcomes were generally very favourable with few nest failures. One clutch of 5 was either infertile or had been chilled in June downpours. Young at one site were seen being taken by a stoat. An adult pair appearing to be well established on territory by late April in an isolated allotment of heather failed to nest and subsequently left the area.

A female hunting at a lowland pond in mid-May in the east of the county well away from any breeding habitat was probably a Scandinavian or Icelandic bird.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

Level of monitoring: Very occasional breeding species – nests monitored when found.

The mosslands are always the prime area for wintering birds and 8 of 9 records in the early winter came from there. Autumn and the late winter brought 47 reports. Twenty of these were from the mosslands, from 14th October to 29th December and although of singles, probably involved at least 3 birds. Twenty further passage records were from the Winter Hill area and nearby moors above Bolton, from 7th October to 5th December. Where a direction was supplied, it was invariably south. Two were recorded on 17th September and 12th October, and 3 on 18th September, involving the pair seen 17th and another bird. A remarkable 7 individuals flew through on 15th September.

Other autumn records came from Ashworth Moor Reservoir (4), Holcombe Moors (2) and Werneth Low.

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.

The Merlin had a much better year in Northumberland in 2019 as regards totals than for the last few years.

As usual the county was well surveyed to the north of the Tyne Gap, but in 2019 a contract fieldworker (David Scott) surveyed 4 estates not normally covered to the south-west of Northumberland, and some additional data was also obtained from the south-east where a group member is branching out from woodland surveying onto the moors.

The data from the northern area reveal 2019 was a very poor season there with fewer occupied territories and a low number of chicks fledging, 25, (31 in 2018). The very wet weather over the 2nd week in June caused some nests to fail, as it did in the south-east where just a single male chick fledged from a brood of 4; his siblings were found dead in the nest at 18 days of age.

Elsewhere in the northern area in the Kielder Border Forest, one nest in a lone Spruce tree failed when the brood was taken by a Goshawk, and at another an adult was predated.

In complete contrast to the northern area, the south-west of Northumberland had, on the face of it, a good year. This area comprises well-kept grouse moors and like the area to the south in Durham, enjoys significant success. An excellent 12 Home Ranges were found and of these 8 nests fledged 25 chicks. At the other 4 territories, due to limited time in the field, no nests were located, but it is considered they almost certainly would have held nests as well.

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.

Occupation for the season tallied exactly with that for both 2017-18. Rather worryingly however, the number of pairs actually nesting has dropped: 3 pairs of the 13 failing to nest represents a 23% fall off and if the trend continues our population will be in dire straits. Not so according to the NYM keepers, however, who carried out their own survey and came up with a very impressive 25 nests on 14 grouse moors producing 52 chicks. Not surprisingly, these figures were treated with a certain amount of suspicion by members of the Merlin Group when a request to see a breakdown of them was refused on the grounds the data were supplied "in confidence". Until the details are made available these claims will continue to be regarded with justified scepticism. Of the 32 young above, 24 were ringed and 8 fitted with PTT tags as part of the Peak District scheme.

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

2019 saw a worrying decline in the previously stable population. Pairs that did breed showed lower productivity than we would usually expect probably due to the inclement weather.

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 area no confirmed breeding was observed on the Upper Derwent Valley moorlands in 2019. One pair was present early in the season and these birds were not seen after the beginning of May; it was possible that the birds did breed and subsequently failed. On the Eastern Moors one pair bred and fledged 4 young. Plenty of suitable habitat is present on the Eastern Moors and the lack of further breeding pairs in this particular region needs further in-depth study.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

Level of monitoring: Occurs as a regular breeding species but no monitoring takes place. No monitoring is undertaken on this species by raptor workers, and no information is available from any monitoring that may have been carried out on estates to the north of the YDNP.

NERF regional summary

Apart from, Durham, (as usual), and Northumberland, (who benefitted from additional survey work this season), other Groups appear to have experienced at best either a moderately successful season or poor one. (This is certainly becoming something of an annual litany in these reviews.) Wet weather featured as a significant adverse factor to the north in Northumberland but seemingly less so elsewhere. The general worrying aspect of the season is the lack of take-up of territories and the failure of some pairs that were ostensibly established on sites to actually go on to breed. Why nesting behaviour should fail to proceed is puzzling. It is difficult to look beyond food supply as the most important component of a nesting territory. One is tempted to assume the problem may be insufficient prey-carrying capacity of sites and that birds are somehow able to determine this instinctively and conclude a breeding attempt would be a waste of time and effort.

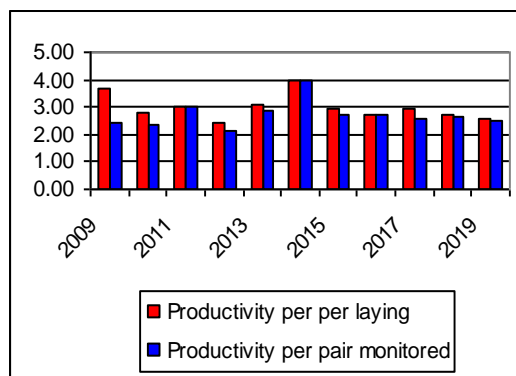
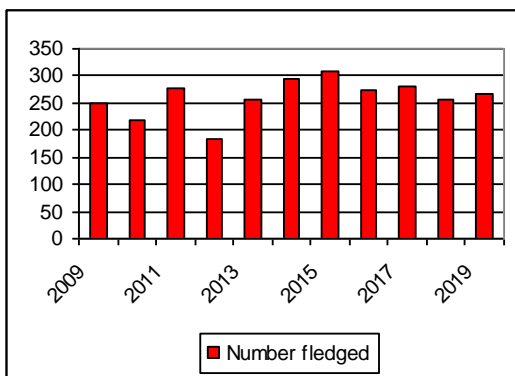
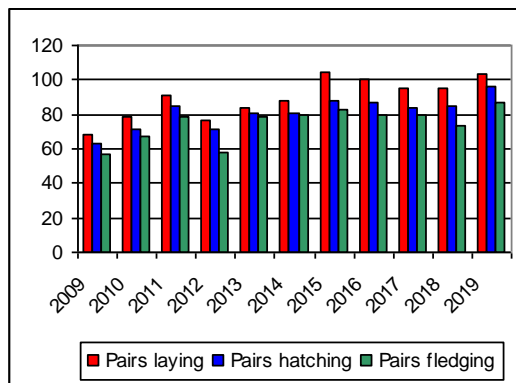
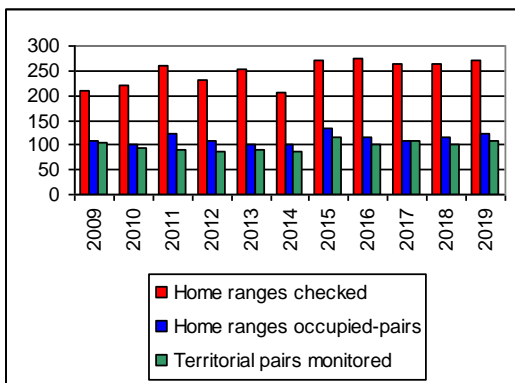
The table below was displayed in the 2018 Review. It shows occupied territories data for the study areas extracted from all NERF annual reviews. For comparative purposes and in order to illustrate the significant decreases that have occurred since the mid-1990s, the figures from the 1994 and 2008 national surveys are included. Those for Durham were not available for the 2018 Review but are included here, which is the principal reason for reproducing the table. Although Durham did in fact experience a significant decrease between the two national surveys, (ca.26%), it was much less than those suffered by other Groups. A gradual decrease in pairs did occur through to 2012 but since then lost ground has been regained and the population is now back on a level with that of the 1994 survey, something no other Group is remotely able to claim. As speculated in the 2018 Review, the one habitat component of the Durham moors that differs significantly from that of the other upland areas is their much greater altitude. This conceivably may well provide distinct breeding season advantages in some way over lower terrain territories, or, the higher, cooler climate may simply appeal more to the species.

Thankfully, there were no moorland fires of any intensity anywhere this season so Merlin broods were safe in that respect.

Territorial Pairs NERF Study Areas

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	National Survey 1994	National Survey 2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
DUBSG	46	34	39	30	30	31	40	40	54	43	38	43	47
NRG	39	12	20	23	26	21	17	20	23	23	18	18	29
NYMUBSG	36	19	17	17	17	14	9	7	11	9	13	13	13
North Peak & South Peak	55	29											
PDRSG			11	13	14	12	13	19	24	20	23	22	14
SPRSG			9	7	9	9	3	2	1	3	2	2	2

Comparative data 2009-2019



Hobby *Falco subbuteo*



David Steel

UK population estimate

In 2020 the UK population was estimated to be 2050 pairs. (Woodward I. *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113, February 2020). The BTO's BBS Report for 2019 shows a 12% increase for England 2018-2019, a 24% decrease 2008-2018, and a 27% decrease from 1995-2018. Clements (2001) estimated the UK population to be in the region of 2,200 breeding pairs. However, following the large-scale expansion in range from southern England to the north, west and east, and the species being widespread south of a line from the Humber to the Mersey, (with the exception of west Wales and Cornwall), bearing in mind there is some evidence of breeding as far north as the Scottish highlands, despite some recent decreases, the current figure is probably considerably higher. Further research, based on a combined 60 years plus of fieldwork in 3 counties, (Kent, Hertfordshire and Derbyshire), and also evidence from many other counties, suggest 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, Everett & Messenger 2016: *The Hobby in Britain—A Revised Population Estimate*). RBBP gives a figure of 289-765 breeding pairs in 2018 with a 5 year minimum of 743 pairs (Eaton, M. *et al.* Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2018 (2020, *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 in 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 if any other observation required for monitoring might cause disturbance of the nesting pairs.

There are no specific threats associated with this species at the present time. However, although 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. Despite the numbers of pairs monitored that actually laid eggs in 2019 was marginally higher and the actual number fledged was down slightly, productivity measured as young fledged per territorial pair was slightly up compared to 2018.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
NYMMSG	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PDRMG	15	15	NC	0	15	15	15	15	29	1.93	1.93
SPRSG	35	35	5	NC	25	25	25	25	43	1.72	1.72
TOTAL	53	50	5	0	40	40	40	40	72	1.80	1.80

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.

As in previous years, several individuals were seen hawking insects over the fells from mid-June until mid-August, but it is thought that breeding pairs are confined to the farmland and

we have been unable to locate breeding locations 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.

Sightings of Hobby are rare within the study area. Despite similar annual observational effort, the number of records does vary significantly from year to year. In 2017 there were 7 sightings during the summer months. In 2018, disappointingly, the number fell to just 2 individual birds,

In 2019 the number of sightings increased sevenfold to 14 between 5th June and 24th August. The 14 sightings are believed to have involved 6 different individuals. In common with previous years, the grouse moor in the west of the study area once again produced the majority of the sightings. A 2cy (first summer) bird was seen on 4 occasions and 2 adults were seen on 2 occasions.

While unproven, it is just possible, having regard to the number of sightings, that a pair did breed in the study area in 2019, but went undetected.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County

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

More birds seemingly holding territory each year, isolated nests are located in Sandbach, Rostherne, Tatton and Mobberley, but outcome is unknown.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

There were just 4 reports from upland areas during the summer. One was seen in Weardale on 19th May and at the end of June. At an elevation of 650m a.s.l., a female Merlin defended her nest against a Hobby which overflowed the site. Singles were seen at the end of August at 2 Pennine reservoirs.

Elsewhere, Durham BC members recorded singles on 15 occasions between 13th May and early September. There was no confirmation of breeding, although this seems possible. Two adults hunted over the River Tees in the south of the county on 26th August at a location which has attracted birds in previous years.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

Level of monitoring: Occurs as a breeding species; nests monitored when found

The spread of records this year was from 13th April to 6th October, coming from 21 sites, (grouping neighbouring locations, e.g. on the mosslands, and on the moors above Horwich).

There was no confirmed breeding, but sightings at Little Woolden Moss and nearby sites were very frequent, with 6 separate birds being seen on 20th August, (in 2 groups of 3), 3 on 7th and 23rd August, with one to 2 birds on 33 other days from 29th April to 30th September, including juveniles. This suggests successful breeding from at least one location in the area.

Elton Reservoir and environs also had sightings on 10 days from 22nd April to 29th August, perhaps indicating breeding somewhere in the Irwell Valley.

Sightings during July, when birds might be expected to be breeding and not birds on passage, came from Ashworth Moor Reservoir, Audenshaw Reservoirs, Ludworth Moor and Tyldesley.

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.

A paucity of sightings was noted by Group members this year. Birds were reported by several gamekeepers as “being about” on several moors and may well have been breeding.

Unfortunately one can rarely pin gamekeepers down to specific dates and locations, and in any case the information tends to be received too late to be worth following up. This species is another which could benefit from some dedicated attention from the Group, but this is unlikely to happen given current manpower restraints.

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.

A reduced effort in fieldwork in Cheshire resulted in only one pair being recorded by PDRMG; this pair successfully fledged 2 young.

In West Yorkshire, 6 pairs were successful fledging 15 young; in South Yorkshire, 5 pairs were successful fledging 8 young, while in North Yorkshire 3 pairs were successful fledging 4 young.

Both the Cheshire and Yorkshire study areas comprise mainly low-lying agricultural land within 25 miles of the Peak District National Park.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Part upland & part lowland areas.

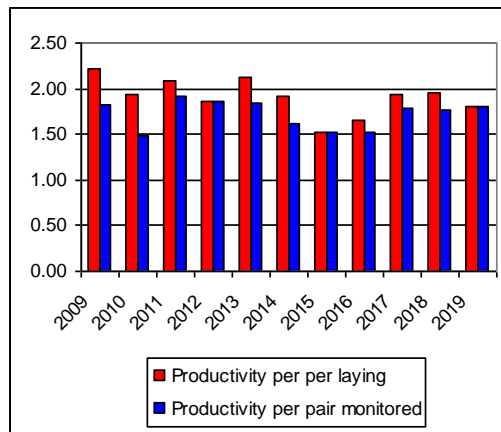
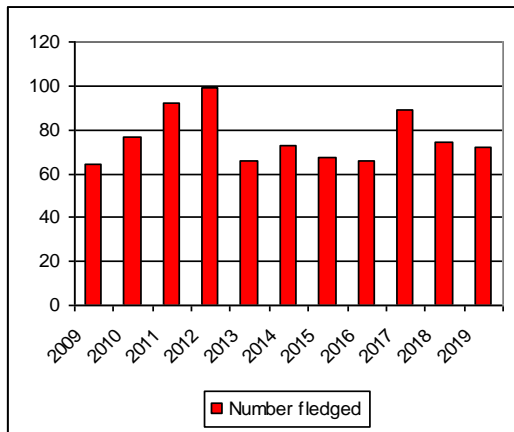
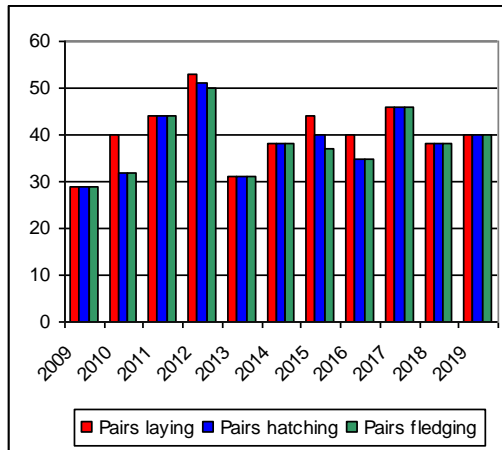
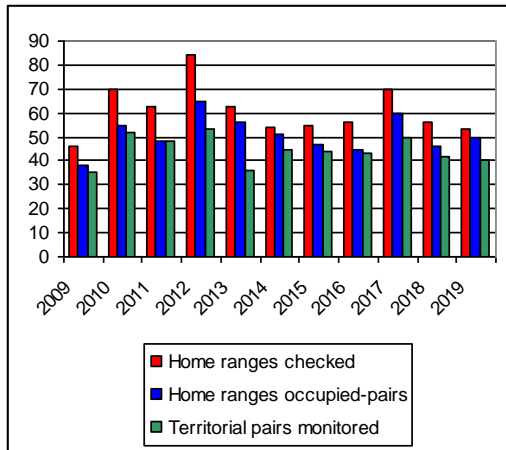
Level of monitoring: Excellent coverage; all or most sites receive annual coverage.

SPRSG member and Hobby expert Anthony Messenger confirmed that in his main 10km square core study area in South Derbyshire 6 sites were occupied by pairs and all were successful fledging 11 young, all of which were ringed, (1.83 young per successful pair, 1.83 young per breeding pair present). One territory had an extra 1st summer female associating with the resident adult birds. (Mick Taylor had a similar occurrence with a pair of Merlins some years ago). Across the whole of Anthony's southern study area, (including the core area), 23 sites were occupied by pairs, 19 of which were successful, 2 were thought to have failed, and of the remaining 2 the outcome was unknown. 33 young fledged, (1.63 per successful pair, 1.35 per breeding pair present); a total of 18 young were ringed. These are the lowest numbers produced since recording started in 1990. Extra 1st summer females associating with the adult birds were noted at a minimum of 5 sites - this is the highest number recorded since the beginning of the study in 1990. In NE Derbyshire, John Atkin, Roy Frost, Mick Lacey, Mike Price and Mick Taylor reported at least 12 further pairs were present of which 6 bred successfully with 12 young fledged. At the remaining 6 sites breeding was not proven.

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.

Comparative data 2009-19



Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*



John Dermott

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. (*Bird Study* 2018:65 pp.1-19). This showed a 22% increase on the previous survey in 2002. The 2019 BBS figures showed an increase of 13% in 2018-19, a decline of 14% 2008-18 and a 40% increase 1995-2018. RBBP, in its 2018 report, gives a figure of 849-1140 pairs. (2020, *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

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 4 groups: egg collectors; gamekeepers; those taking eggs on the point of hatch or chicks, sometimes to be smuggled overseas, and pigeon fanciers. Over the past 2 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. The continuing increase in pairs nesting on high buildings in urban conurbations, and their good success rate, counter-balances losses on the moors. However, there can also be problems inherent to these situations. These include urgent roof repairs, window cleaning by specialist contractors, air conditioning malfunctions, and disturbance from fireworks, drones 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 problems with managers unfamiliar with raptors and the law.

The threats faced by Peregrines on some 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 to known outcome	Known Pairs laying eggs	Known pairs hatching eggs	Known pairs fledging young	Minimum number of fledged young	Young fledged per pair laying	Young fledged per territorial pair monitored
BRSG	20	3	0	1	3	3	3	2	5	1.67	1.67
CaRSG	5	3	NC	NC	2	2	2	2	7	3.50	3.50
ChRSG	5	5	NC	2	5	3	3	3	5	1.67	1.00
DUBSG	20	9	2	3	6	6	6	6	13	2.17	2.17
MRG	16	14	2	2	14	12	11	11	32	2.67	2.29
NRG	28	14	2	3	11	7	5	5	8	1.14	0.73
NYMMSG	4	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	3.00	3.00
PDRMG	21	6	NC	3	3	3	2	2	4	1.33	1.33
SPRSG	36	31	1	NC	28	28	20	18	36*	1.29*	1.29*
YDNP	18	7	0	0	7	6**	4	4	13	2.17	1.86
TOTAL	173	95	7	14	80	71	57	54	126	1.77	1.58

*includes 2 pairs in Staffordshire fledging at least 3 young

**Two pairs were monitored where the nest scrapes cannot be viewed and no nest visits were made. Behavioural observations were indicative of incubation and so it was assumed that eggs had been laid.

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.

2019 was another very disappointing year for this species in Bowland, another in the increasingly long run of years in which breeding numbers have been far below the levels of the 2000s when up to 15 pairs nested annually here.

Three pairs were found to have laid eggs, and just 2 of those managed to fledge chicks. The 3rd pair's nesting attempt failed for unexplained reasons just after eggs had hatched, as happened in 2018.

Many historically productive home ranges remain unoccupied, and it is thought that persecution linked to intensive driven grouse shooting remains the primary reason for the species' precarious status.

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.

Three pairs of Peregrines were located within the study area during 2019. One pair in Halifax town centre was present throughout the year but there was no evidence of breeding. Two other pairs were successful in raising a combined total of 7 chicks. Perhaps more disappointing is that for the 3rd successive year a traditional site was unoccupied.

Juveniles were regularly reported on the north western edge of the study area in the early autumn; however these birds were thought to have come from a successful pair that traditionally nests just over the Lancashire border.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Possibly under-recorded given the number of private/high security sites available. Two pairs nest on the chemical works in the Northwich area.

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

The data in the table and the comments below refer to the whole of County Durham excluding the north side of Teesmouth.

In a small but very significant and important development one pair had a successful nest within the North Pennine SPA, the first such for more than 20 years. Two young fledged. Disappointingly and in stark contrast, the only other report from traditional eyries in the uplands involved a lone male in April.

In the eastern lowlands Peregrines fared better than in 2018. Pairs were present at 8 locations early in the season and a single male lingered at another. Three pairs failed to settle for reasons that were unclear but 5 pairs went on to fledge 11 young.

Whilst the total of 8 pairs at the beginning of the season offers some encouragement, there appears to be some limitation on further expansion in the lowlands around suitable nest sites and perhaps unintentional disturbance.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Twelve pairs definitely nearly fledged and pure white in colour) saturated, recently-city centre 11th June an attempt made to was found at the end of



bred, hatching 33 chicks, of which one died when another soon after fledging; one pair's eggs (unusually disappeared just after the expected hatch date. A fledged juvenile was found in Ancoats just north of the and taken to RSPCA Stapeley where it was ringed and foster it into a Stockport brood, but this failed and it June at Fiddlers Ferry power station, underweight. It

went to an avian vet in the midlands and was found to have a heart murmur and kept in care. There was no indication of where this bird had been bred, as no pairs were thought to have bred in the city centre in 2019. However, events in 2020 now make it possible that it had come from Manchester Town Hall where up to 3 birds were present in March and April 2019. Due to reliable information that there was no possible site there, these territory-holders were not followed up (but this was to change in 2020).

At the regular city centre site the mother and son pair were present early in the season but nearby signage works may have disturbed them. By mid-April it was clear that there was a dead bird (the ringed regular male) lying by the nest tray. He was recovered by our steeplejack 2nd May and found to have some kind of white substance plastered over its rump. Neither WIIS nor CEH were willing to analyse this substance, so it was never known whether this contributed to his death. The 16 year old female was last seen in August.

Regular readers of this Review may remember a short article in the 2016 edition about a pair of Peregrines which lived in Wigan for 9 months of the year but bred at Chorley 13km away, despite 2 nest trays available to them in Wigan since 2014. At last this pair (both born 2012) saw sense and bred successfully at Trencherfield Mill, Wigan, fledging 4 chicks.

At Rochdale Town Hall, the male was found in an adjoining park 24th June, weak and able to be captured without difficulty. It transpired that he had lost about one third of the upper and lower mandibles of his bill, presumably the result of a collision with the stonework of the building. He died in care 27th June having lost too much weight and suffering from aspergillosis. A new male was watched arriving on 3rd July and was observed chasing the newly fledged juveniles and female.

There was possible or probable breeding at Salford's Media City and a large chemical works in Trafford MBC, but it was impossible to monitor these sites.

Territories were also held at 2 mills, a quarry where breeding has regularly occurred in the past, and Manchester Airport.

A bird using the pylons at Elton Reservoir was found shot there, May 7th.

Northumbria Ringing Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

2019 was a very poor year in Northumberland, with the Peregrine population now in decline over most of the uplands and only some of the lowland territories doing well. There were only 14 occupied home ranges (16 in 2018) and with a very poor 8 chicks fledged (19 in 2018) it will go down as one of the worst years on record.

As stated in last year's report, in one study area only 50% of the sites were occupied by adult birds, and in this area productivity is now almost zero - this has been the case for a number of years.

It's hard to understand the reasons behind the declines. Persecution is suspected but very hard to prove; one nest had the chicks taken, but the main problem is pairs on home ranges just not breeding. At one site in the Kielder area a cliff has held birds for the last two years, and even with them being on site all year both years, they have failed to lay any eggs or even make a scrape.

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.

Of the 2 regular inland sites checked one was again unoccupied, the other was occupied but not monitored so the outcome there was not known. It came to the attention of a Merlin Group member that a pair was nesting in a quarry to the south of the study area where clay

pigeon shooting was regularly taking place creating considerable disturbance to the birds. The owner was notified of the situation and as a result the shooting ceased and the pair bred successfully fledging 3 chicks. Of the 6 known sites on the coastal stretch of the National Park, only one was checked early season when it was occupied by a pair, but the outcome there was not determined.

Outside the breeding season Teesmouth Bird Club members recorded birds at the well-watched locations of Scaling Dam Reservoir and Sleddale.

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.

A poor year for Peregrine, probably in part due to the inclement weather. One pair failed in suspicious circumstances shortly after laying eggs with the disappearance of the adult birds.

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

In the SPRSG recording area of the Upper Derwent Valley 3 previously successful home ranges were checked in 2019 and 2 were found to be occupied by pairs in the early part of the season. Further repeat visits confirmed successful breeding at the Alport Castles site where 3 young fledged; at the 2nd site the pair failed at the small young stage and were thought to have been robbed. Elsewhere in the SPRSG's study area 33 further sites were checked for occupancy. Adult pairs were located at 29 of them in the early part of the season. At 3 previously successful sites no birds were seen; 2 of these sites were large working quarries and the 3rd a natural limestone crag which has been deserted since the resident pair moved to another similar crag some years ago; at one new site only a single adult bird was present in April / early May. Successful breeding was confirmed at 17 sites with a minimum of 33 young fledged. At the 12 remaining sites, 3 held adult pairs in the early part of the season, but breeding was not able to be confirmed, 6 pairs were logged as having failed. At 2 of these sites the female sat throughout May and into June with no apparent hatch, and at the urban site in Sheffield the female disappeared after 4 eggs had been laid. Three sites were presumed to have been robbed and Derbyshire Wildlife Crime Unit and RSPB Investigations were informed. Adult pairs again bred successfully on 2 natural limestone crags where climbing restrictions were put in place by National Trust and Natural England with the cooperation of Peak Park and British Mountaineering Council. There were 3 urban sites as usual: Sheffield St. George's Church, Derby Cathedral and Belper East Mill; a total of 6 young fledged from the 2 latter sites (2 and 4, respectively). The Derby chicks (a male and a female) were ringed by Dave Budworth, with an unhatched egg there sent away for analysis. Member Steve Samworth reported on the Sheffield failure on <https://sheffieldperegrines.wordpress.com/2019/05/>. The results from the urban sites are included in the totals above.

In addition to the 3 regular urban sites 4 further urban sites were reported to the group as occupied by pairs during the breeding season; 3 pairs probably bred and one pair was proven to have bred. These latter records are NOT included in the figures above.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Please note that the data refer only to the Yorkshire area of the YDNP and does not include any records from Cumbria.

The number of occupied sites remains relatively stable with the regular sites once again occupied. There were 4 successful pairs compared to 5 in each of the last 3 years. Two pairs failed at either egg or chick stage, with the female of a 3rd pair sitting throughout the season but not laying any eggs.

NERF regional summary

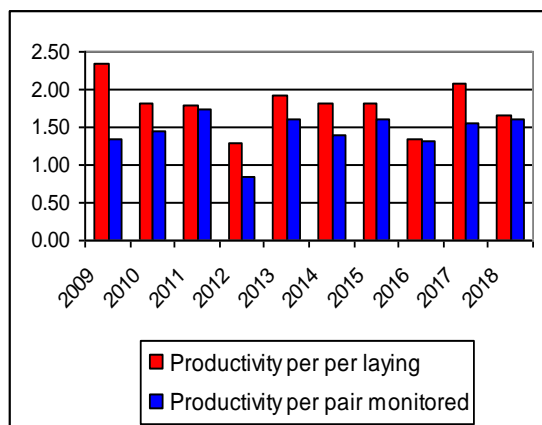
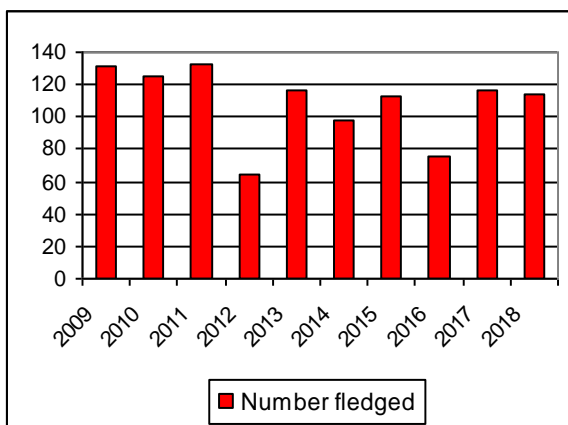
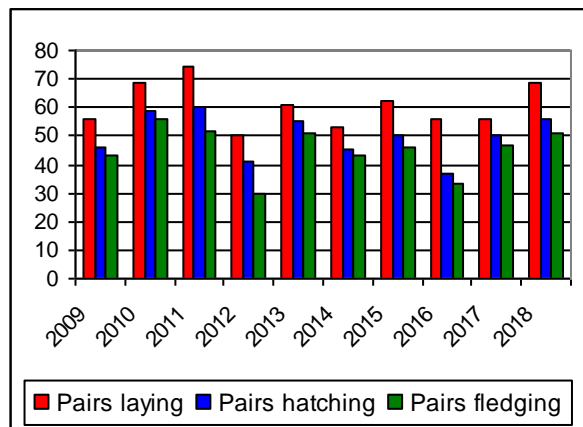
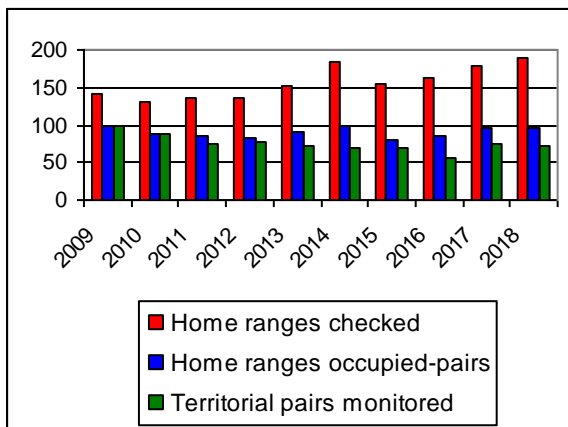
The total number of chicks fledged increased by 12 this year. Inclement weather was only cited as a problem by one group, but unexplained failure at moorland sites, probably or certainly due to human interference, was mentioned by 4 groups. Six groups were concerned about non-breeding which was probably not linked to persecution.

Urban sites where cameras have been installed continue to attract much public interest and provide opportunities for excellent PR which can only be beneficial for this species.

With regard to thefts in used or disused quarries, it is important to liaise with the helpful British Mountaineering Council as well as the police and the Mineral Products Association's Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Group. A list of MPA members can be found at:

http://www.mineralproducts.org/cont_members01.htm

Comparative data 2009-2019



Common Raven *Corvus corax*



Steve Downing

UK population estimate

In 2016 the summer population was estimated at 10,000 pairs in the UK (Woodward et al 2020, APEP 4: British Birds 113, February 2020.)

The 2019 BTO Breeding Bird Survey Report showed that there was a 11% decrease 2018-19, but a 49% increase 2008-2018, and a 41% increase in population between 1995 and 2018.

Conservation status

UK:	Green
European:	Least concern
Global:	Least concern

National and regional threat assessment

Nationally the Raven population has been slowly recovering in recent years, excluding a small dip in 2016 - 2017. However, persecution remains a serious problem in many areas, particularly where they come into perceived conflict with the game shooting industry and sheep farmers who assert that they can be a threat to new born lambs.

NERF Data

RAPTOR STUDY GROUP	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	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	3	2	0	0	2	2	2	2	7	3.50	3.50
CRSG	5	5	0	0	4	4	4	4	8	2.00	2.00
DUBSG	6	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
MRG	5	5	NC	NC	5*	5	3	3	13*	2.60	2.60
NRG	35	26	2	7	19	18	18	17	46	2.56	2.42
NYMUBSG	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
PDRSG	21	7	NC	1	7	7	7	7	24	3.43	3.43
SPRSG	18	18	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
YDNP	19	10	0	0	7	7	4	4	11	1.57	1.57
TOTAL	114	74	6	9	39	43	38	37	109	2.53	2.79

Group Reports

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Upland areas only.

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

This species is only systematically monitored in one part of the Forest of Bowland by the Study Group.

Once again 2 pairs successfully fledged young during 2019. In addition, flocks of up to 15 non-breeding birds were seen regularly during the breeding season. A large winter roost, in a remote part of the Study Area, was reported to contain in excess of 75 birds.

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 number of sightings of Raven continues to increase annually within the Study Area. In total 254 records were received from all parts of Calderdale during 2019. This represents 68.2% increase on the previous year.

Five pairs attempted to breed and 4 successfully raised chicks. Three of the nests produced one, 2 and 5 chicks respectively. Whilst the 4th nest was successful the number of chicks fledging is unknown.

A 5th nest was built by a pair however, they failed to produce eggs. The year's largest gatherings of Raven were 11 individuals seen at Walshaw Dean, in the west of the Study Area, in October, and another 11 birds, most probably the same individuals, were seen nearby at Gorple in November.

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

Raven is an uncommon resident and whilst thinly distributed is slowly increasing in numbers. No comprehensive monitoring of Raven is undertaken in the Study Area. However, it is known locally that nests occur in a variety of habitats, including in trees, on cliffs, on power pylons and other tall man-made industrial structures. Regrettably due to lack of resources within the Group, the ability to monitor these sites is severely limited and the outcomes remain unknown.

As in previous years, the Group is aware that some conflict occurs at sites containing other raptor species breeding nearby. This is particularly relevant at Beeston Castle where conflict continues to take place between Raven and Peregrine.

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.

Raven are present in upland areas throughout the year with autumn and winter gatherings typically of 2 to 6 birds, exceptionally 8 to 10 individuals. However, they remain an extremely rare breeding bird with very few nesting attempts recorded over the last 3 or more decades.

2019 was no exception and a pair seen at just one potential breeding site apparently failed to lay eggs. Direct evidence of illegal persecution is rarely found but intolerance must be a significant factor explaining why the breeding population is so rigidly depressed.

Manchester Raptor Group

Extent of coverage: Whole County.

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

In the table, above, in the section *Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome* the Group has recorded 5 sites. However, the actual total number of fledglings at 2 of these sites is not known. In the section *Known Number of Fledged Young* the Group has recorded 13 fledglings. This number is based on the fact that 11 young are known to have fledged from 3 of the sites. In addition to those 3 sites it is presumed from initial observations at the 2 remaining sites the Group determined, from monitoring adult behaviour, that eggs were being incubated during the breeding season. However, no further monitoring was undertaken and therefore the actual number of fledglings from these 2 sites remains unknown. Nonetheless it is reasonable to assume that some chicks fledged and consequently one young from each has been added to the total number of fledglings.

There was also probable breeding at the industrial complex of Basell Polyolefins, Carrington. The remains of a nest were found at the end of the breeding season and the staff on site reported that birds have bred there in the recent past.

Two, then later 4 birds displayed and held a territory between 4th and 6th January on a pylon at Elton Reservoir, however, they did not breed. A pair at Agecroft Industrial Estate was described as “resident” and a pair at Flixton was noted displaying 19th April. A pair displayed on Morrison’s chimney in Chorley, this site is often used by Peregrines and the presence of the Ravens may have accounted for the local Peregrines remaining in Wigan in 2019.

In late summer, there were reports of parties of Raven in double figures at 2 sites. Ten individuals were noted flying south-west at Elton Reservoir on 8th September. On 21st September 13 individuals were recorded together in the Winter Hill area.

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 Northumbrian Raven population has remained fairly constant over the last few years and 2019 was little different when the Group recorded an increase of one pair on the previous year.

Productivity during 2019 was exceptional with a total of 46 chicks, averaging 2.7, fledging from each of 17 nests.

The majority of the sites which failed early in the season were occupied by pairs that didn’t line their nests. It is likely that some of these were young birds just pairing up for the first time. At one location a pair occupied a crag site throughout the whole season; however they did not build a nest. Ravens nested in Slaley Forest for the first time, fledging one chick.

In July a large flock, in excess of 40 individuals, was recorded in the south Cheviots.

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 former breeding site at Ravenscar was not occupied for the 3rd year in succession.

Whilst no confirmed observations were received from across the NYMs during 2019 there were occasional vague, unsubstantiated, rumours of birds occurring at several locations.

There are large areas of suitable Raven habitat within the Study Area and there is little doubt that this species should be far more common across NYM uplands than it is at the present time. Regrettably persecution is believed to be the primary cause preventing the expansion of this species in the region.

It is very possible that several pairs could be established, unrecorded, along the coastal stretches that lie to both north and south of Ravenscar. Unfortunately due to the lack of resources within the Group, combined with the commitment to long-term studies of other species, it is not possible to investigate these potential sites at the present time.

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.

There is a large area of unoccupied suitable Raven habitat in the Study Area. However, Raven, in common with other large raptor species, appears to be seriously under-represented as a breeding species in the upland areas monitored by the PDRMG.

News of a poisoning incident involving a Raven was released by the RSPB in March 2019.

The press release can be accessed via the link below:

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/investigations/posts/poisoned-raven-found-in-peak-district-national-park>

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 White Peak quarries and those in NE Derbyshire having successful breeding pairs with broods of 3 or 4 young.

Ant Messenger recorded 18 occupied tree nests in the south of our recording area [south of Carsington Water] – 6 in Corsican Pine, 6 in Scots Pine, 2 in Cedar, one in Oak, one in Wellingtonia, one in Larch and one in Norway Spruce. All were successful, but brood sizes and nest spacing were not noted, as more time was spent searching for Red Kites.

In the area breeding pairs were located in many disused and working quarries; full monitoring was not possible, but successful breeding was noted at several sites, with 3 or 4 young fledging each time. Vic Pearson recorded tree nesting in the Whaley Bridge area and from other sites in the Derbyshire Dales; he also commented that occasionally 2 pairs of Ravens bred successfully in the larger quarries in the Buxton area.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Extent of coverage: Part upland and part lowland areas.

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

Please note that the data refer only to the Yorkshire area of the YDNP and does not include any records from the Cumbria or Lancashire sections of the National Park.

There were the same number of sites occupied in 2019 as the previous year, however there were only 4 successful nesting attempts and this was the lowest number recorded for several years. Monitoring was not possible at 2 sites during the late chick/fledging period, therefore the outcomes were unknown. In addition one nesting attempt appeared to fail due to natural causes. Another pair did attempt to nest at a site last occupied in 2012 but failed at the egg stage.

One pair attempted to nest for the first time on the edge of a grouse moor and despite completing nest building and starting to incubate; inexplicably there were no further signs of any birds after 30th March. At another site, also on the edge of a grouse moor, at least one large young bird was seen in the nest on 4th May. No further monitoring took place and consequently it is not known if the nesting attempt was successful or not.

NERF regional summary

Raptor Workers in the NERF Study Area have long known that Raven populations have been suppressed year upon year in the northern uplands. Examination of the summary of the 2019 table above reveals the true picture. Of the 109 young fledging in 2019 c70% were produced in 3 Raptor Study areas, the Dark Peak, the Yorkshire Dales and Northumberland.

Collectively all of the other NERF Study Group areas only produced 28 chicks. There are huge tracts of unoccupied habitat in the North of England and yet the overall population remains static.

Despite large tracts of eminently suitable habitat in County Durham, geographical area 2576 km² [990 square miles], and on the North York Moors, geographical area 1136 km² [554 square miles], both of these areas, once again, have produced no breeding birds. It is inconceivable that a combined land mass of 4012 km² [1544 square miles] of largely suitable habitat should be devoid of breeding Raven unless the population is being consistently, intentionally and systematically suppressed.

Where Ravens breed successfully the productivity is within the annual statistical norms; an indication that it is not habitat or prey availability that is the cause of the variations across the combined NERF Study Area. There are no doubt fringe issues, including prevailing unfavourable weather conditions and in some localities cases of low prey availability, that cause these population differences between the productive and non-productive Study Areas during discrete breeding seasons. However, whilst anomalies in breeding success are bound to occur, these cannot account for the same vast areas of suitable habitat being devoid of birds year-on-year-on-year. The main driver of failure appears to be related to land use. That leaves us with the question; in cases where the lack of suitable habitat and lack of prey are not the causes of absence of breeding Ravens, what are? The uplands across the Pennines, the North York Moors and the Forest of Bowland are dominated by grouse moors and hill farming, therefore it is impossible not to come to the conclusion that Raven populations, along with raptors and owls, are being methodically suppressed by persecution in some areas. The NERF 11-year Raven data shown in the table below brings the issue in to sharp focus once again. During this period NERF has recorded a total of 1288 fledglings, however the average productivity remain stubbornly at 117.9 per year. Ravens are long-lived birds; the oldest known record is of a bird 17 years, 11 months and 15 days from the date of ringing [BTO data], and yet the breeding population is static, both geographically and numerically. It is self-evident that there are areas of the NERF Study Area that hold a sink population of Raven and this inevitability means that there is an inability for the species to expand from the core breeding areas. 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 systematically killed illegally.

‘All NERF’ annual Raven data analysis

YEAR	Home ranges checked	Home Ranges occupied by pairs	Single birds	Pairs failing to settle	Territorial pairs monitored to known outcome	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	4	60	57	55	53	84	1.47	1.40
2018	116	84	3	8	52	44	44	44	132	3.00	2.54
2019	114	74	6	9	39	43	38	37	109	2.53	2.79
Totals	1274	884	21	116	610	547	517	477	1288	2.35	2.11
Av. / year	115.82	80.36	1.91	10.55	55.45	49.73	47.00	43.36	117.09	2.35	2.11

NERF regional threat assessment

The national threat assessment for this species is applicable in the NERF region. There is no doubt that locally Raven populations are suppressed by persecution. It is essential that Raptor Workers remain vigilant when surveying Raven and all suspicious activities, including the use of gas guns and bangers ropes in close proximity to Raven nests should be reported to the local Police Wildlife Crime Officer and please ask for an incident number.

In addition to reporting persecution and other suspicious incidents to the Police please report the cases to the RSPB Investigations Team.

Record the time, date and grid reference, there are several mobile phone apps available that provide this information and many Police Forces also use the 'What3Words' app. Please also remember to take photographs. If you come across a suspected poisoning incident under no circumstances should you touch the potential victim or the bait. Several of the poisons used to kill birds of prey are highly toxic and can kill on contact. Cover both with vegetation and contact the authorities as soon as practicably possible.

Summary of Raptor Monitoring in Shropshire during 2019

The historic county of Shropshire covers the current county of Shropshire, and the Borough of Telford and Wrekin. The Shropshire groups referred to here all cover the whole of the historic county.

The Shropshire Raptor Study Group was set up in 2010, to co-ordinate the monitoring and conservation of birds of prey in Shropshire. It joined NERF as an "Advisory member" in 2020. Monitoring work has concentrated on breeding Goshawk, Hobby, Merlin and Red Kite, with the small group of members trying to find the nest sites of these species. Kestrel was added in 2019.

The Shropshire Peregrine Group was established in 1997, and Shropshire Barn Owl Group in 2002, so these groups were well established before the formation of the Raptor Group. The latter co-operates with the former, but does not duplicate its work.

All three groups provide summaries of their results for publication in the annual Shropshire Bird Report, and further information can be found on the Shropshire Ornithological Society website www.shropshirebirds.com and also:

www.shropshirebirds.com/index/bird-conservation/the-shropshire-raptor-study-group/

www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk/

www.shropshireperegrines.co.uk/

Raptor Group results 2019

The status of the target species is described, and the monitoring results in 2019 are summarised in the table.

Goshawk

South-west Shropshire is a national stronghold, but the species is spreading, and 2 of the successful nests were in the northern half of the County. Displaying pairs were also reported in the breeding season at 2 sites not known to the Raptor Group, which will be monitored in

future years. Population was estimated at 31-50 breeding pairs in 2014, but has increased since.

Hobby

Numbers found fluctuate considerably. In 2019, 3 of the recently fledged young came from nests that were not found. In 2014, the population was estimated “to exceed 70 breeding pairs in good years”, but it is unlikely this number has been reached since then.

Merlin

There is one traditional breeding site, with one, occasionally 2, pairs found since 2010, but none was found in 2018 or 2019.

Red Kite

The first successful breeding for 130 years occurred as recently as 2006. Monitoring was initially carried out for the Welsh Kite Trust, and jointly since 2010. The 37 nests found in 2019 were 9 more than the previous highest total (28 in 2017).

Kites have spread rapidly from the south-west, and might be found breeding anywhere now. Nests found in 2019 include the furthest east, right on the county boundary with Staffordshire, and the furthest north, several kilometres north of Shrewsbury.

The tagging programme has finished, but 2 young from one nest were ringed and tagged, bringing the total of tagged young from Shropshire nests since 2006 to 212.

Kestrel

The Shropshire Ringing Group has been operating a nest-box and colour-ringing project, primarily in north-east Shropshire, for some years. In 2019 it became a joint project with the Raptor group, and it operated across the County, with the active support of Community Wildlife Groups.

A small start was made to the joint project, and chicks in 5 nests (mostly in boxes) were colour-ringed, and a further 6 nests were found (outcome unknown). We know of about 30 Kestrel nest boxes across the County, and we have more to install when suitable sites are found.

Kestrels have declined considerably in recent years, and numbers are less now than the 2014 estimate of 300-350 breeding pairs published in *The Birds of Shropshire*.

Summary of Shropshire Raptor Study Group results 2019

Species	Previously occupied sites checked	Territories		Outcome				Ringed	Colour-ringed / tagged
		Nests found	Additional pairs	Successful	Failed	Unknown	Fledged young (minimum)		
Goshawk	50+	22	4	14	7	1	28		10
Hobby	40+	6	8	4	2		11	3	
Merlin	1	0	0						
Red Kite	80+	37	5	23	13	1	35		2

The high failure rate is attributed largely to prolonged and heavy rain, which lasted for several days from 10th June onwards.

Peregrine

(Shropshire Peregrine Group results)

In 2019, 23 sites were monitored, with 22 of these producing breeding attempts, of which 16 (73%) were successful (producing at least one fledged young): 46 chicks hatched, and 40 fledged, the best outcome since 2016.

Peregrine has bred regularly only since 1987, increasing by about 1-2 pairs a year to 19 breeding attempts in 2003. Numbers were fairly stable for the next 11 years, with 20 breeding attempts recorded for the first time in 2015, 20 or more in the next three years, but 22 in 2019 is the highest yet.

A number of chicks have been colour-ringed each year since 2004. Over 30 sites have been used altogether, mostly in quarries. Less than 10 are natural sites, and old Crow or Magpie nests have been used occasionally.

Barn Owl

(Shropshire Barn Owl Group results)

Largely as a result of the Barn Owl Group's nest-box scheme (430 boxes installed altogether) and their other conservation work, the County population has increased from an estimated 140 breeding pairs when the group was formed in 2002 to around 200 - 220 pairs now.

In 2019, 204 sites, mostly nest boxes, were checked, and at least one egg was laid in 74 of them. While a few pairs were not successful, 68 pairs produced 219 chicks, but 48 were subsequently lost in the nest, possibly due to predation but most likely due to starvation as a result of heavy and persistent rainfall in June. Three pairs, including one with a successful 1st brood, produced 2nd broods. Seven of the pairs were at new sites.

The SBOG Annual Report, including comparative data since 2002, can be found on the website (see above).

Status of other Raptors in Shropshire

(taken from the *Shropshire Bird Report 2019* (in prep), and *The Birds of Shropshire*, published by Liverpool University Press in 2019)

Common Buzzard

Not monitored. Breeding population growing, now over 2,000 pairs, having spread from the south-west in the last 30 years.

Marsh Harrier

Rare but increasing passage migrant, probably 8-9 individuals in 2019, half in the Whixall Moss area, including only the 2nd winter record.

Hen Harrier

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor, with at least 7 and perhaps as many as 11 individuals recorded in 2019, mainly from Whixall Moss. Most records are believed to involve birds from the breeding population in north Wales. There have been no modern (post-1950) confirmed breeding records, but JNCC report 441 (2011) indicated that there is breeding habitat for up to 10 breeding pairs if persecution was stopped and the population was allowed to expand to natural levels.

Raven

Widespread breeding species, no longer monitored. The breeding population is growing, and is now around 400 pairs, having spread across the County from the south-west in the last 30 years.

Sparrowhawk

Widespread breeding species, not monitored, but population not well understood. An estimate of 530-1600 breeding pairs in 2014 was published in *The Birds of Shropshire*.

Honey Buzzard

Rare passage migrant, but no records in 2019. A pair bred regularly at one site 1995-2006, and individual birds have been seen occasionally in the same area since, but there has been no further evidence of breeding.

Osprey

Rare passage migrant. Probably 8-9 individuals in 2019, 5-6 on spring migration; one in June was probably a prospecting immature returning to the UK for the first time, while 2 were presumably heading south on autumn passage.

Long-eared Owl

Rare resident, but very elusive and status poorly understood. In 2019, a confirmed breeding record was the first since 2012, and another recorded in December was only the third record since 2012 (the other in 2017).

Short-eared Owl

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant, becoming increasingly scarce, with 3-6 individuals recorded at 2 sites in 2019.

Leo Smith

Convenor

Shropshire Raptor Study Group

leo@leosmith.org.

A Summary of Raptor Monitoring in the Washburn Valley, Southern Nidderdale AONB and adjacent areas in Yorkshire during 2019.

The Washburn Valley, the southern section of the Nidderdale AONB, Ilkley Moor and nearby moors is currently monitored by a loose consortium of Raptor Workers and bird watchers, some of whom were formerly members of the Yorkshire Dales / Nidderdale RSG. The Washburn Group does not collate data in a formal manner at the moment; rather they share data on several species, collected by informal observations.

Whilst the data collected do not follow the standardised NERF format they give an overview of some species that occupy land on the eastern fringe of the Yorkshire Pennines adjacent to the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Common Buzzard

Common Buzzard is widespread across the Washburn Valley and surrounding areas; however the species is not formally monitored therefore this data should be seen as an overview rather than a definitive list. Nonetheless the Group recorded 20 confirmed breeding pairs and believe that the area contained a minimum of 3 additional pairs. The area is extensive and is monitored by limited resources; consequently it is not unreasonable to assume that additional pairs went undetected.

Timble Ings held 3 pairs, outcome unknown.

Lindley Wood Reservoir held 3 pairs, outcome unknown.

Sword Point Plantation held a minimum of one pair, outcome unknown. In another section of the plantation observations of adult behaviour suggested that there was a 2nd nest.

Farnley Lake Wood held 2 nests, both of which produced 2 young.

Farnley Hall held a further 3 nests, 2 of which produced 2 chicks each whilst the 3rd failed.

Farnley held one nest, producing 3 young.

Dob Park Wood held one nest, outcome unknown.

Beecroft Moor Plantation held one nest, outcome unknown.

Dearcombe Head held one pair, outcome unknown.

Denton Hall Estate held 3 pairs. Two nests produced 2 young and one young respectively, whilst the 3rd failed.

Weston held one pair, producing 2 young.

Casual observations in the Thruscross area suggested that the area held 2 pairs with a further pair at Fewston.

Merlin

The Group only recorded one sighting during 2019 in the Nidderdale AONB when a male was observed displaying on Beamsley Moor. Unfortunately the outcome is unknown.

Bingley Moor held one nest, producing 5 young.

Hawksworth Moor held one nest producing 3 young.

Morton Moor; the local gamekeeper reported a nest to the local Raptor Worker, however the outcome at this site is unknown.

Keighley Moor held one, possibly 2 pairs, again the outcomes are unknown.

Marsh Harrier

A pair was recorded displaying on Langbar Moor and driving off Ravens in late April. However, after this initial observation the birds were not seen again.

Hen Harrier

No display or nesting attempts were reported during 2019. However; a grey male was observed in the Denton, Blubberhouses and Kex Gill areas regularly through the early months with last sighting late May/early June. It is not possible to say whether or not these sightings were of the same or different birds.

Two grey males were also noted in the Askwith Moor roost on a single evening.

Raven

The Group is aware of successful breeding at:

Timble Ings, Hebers Ghyll Woods and the Sandwith Moor Plantation. The outcome at these sites is unknown.

Additional pairs are believed to have bred in the Lindley Wood, Scargill and Dob Park areas; however once again the outcomes remain unknown.

Several parties of up to 8 individuals noted during the winter on Denton Moor.

Goshawk

During 2019 there was only one report of a single bird in the area, possibly on passage. The bird was observed over woodland at Farnley Lake in April.

Sparrowhawk

A nest was found at Farnley Lake, however no further monitoring took place and the outcome is unknown. Pairs were also observed displaying at numerous sites in the Washburn Valley.

Once again no further monitoring took place.

Honey Buzzard

A pair was recorded displaying at Lindley Wood Reservoir in late June. Probably the same birds were observed on several occasions in the nearby Sandwith Moor Plantation in early/mid-July. Despite these sightings there was no evidence of breeding.

Osprey

A minimum of two 4th calendar year birds, both believed to be males, were observed regularly at Lindley Wood Reservoir from mid-April until mid-August. This is a suitable location for breeding birds to settle and it is possible that these birds were prospecting for potential nest sites in future years.

Long-eared Owl

Seven pairs of Long-eared Owl were recorded by the Group during 2019:

Four individual groups of young were heard calling at Timble Ings.

Three nests with adults incubating/brooding were located on the southern edge of Denton Moor.

One pair was located at Hoodstorth.

No further observations were undertaken, and the outcomes at these sites remain unknown.

Short-eared Owl

Observations on Middleton Moor, Askwith/Denton Moor, Kex Gill Moor and Hey Slack Allotment indicated that these areas had been occupied by breeding birds. Unfortunately due to the lack of resources it was not possible to monitor the areas fully and the outcomes are unknown.

Data kindly supplied by Andy Jowett on behalf of the Washburn Valley Group.

RARER SPECIES MONITORED BY NERF Occurrences in 2019

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*



White-tailed Eagle at Farndale – Reece Fowler

Northumbria Ringing Group

2019 was an exciting time in Northumberland for the White-tailed Eagle with records of 2 different birds,

The first was a 2nd calendar year bird seen by 2 observers on 12th April, watched heading over the northern slopes of Cheviot towards the Harthope catchment.

The second White-tailed Eagle was a real surprise. It was from the Irish Reintroduction project (named Aonghus). Having crossed over southern Scotland, then coming down the Tweed valley, near Berwick it entered Northumberland, on 7th May. It then spent a little time in the lower reaches of the rivers running east out of the Cheviots. By the end of May it had moved into the northern Cheviots, where it spent the whole summer.

Leaving Northumberland via the border ridge on 15th November, it passed north of Kielder Forest, on to Dumfries and Galloway.

North Yorks Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

One recorded at Sleddale on 17th March may well have been the bird recorded in the same general area over the November/December period in 2018.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*



Gordon Yates

With the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project now releasing its first young eagles in the Moffat hills, it was hoped some of them would stray across the border into Northumberland. After the excitement of having the Irish White-tailed Eagle summer in the county, it was even more exciting to have records of Golden Eagles as well.

Three eagles were released in Scotland, and 2 have been recorded in Northumberland, named Beaky (c11) and Emily (121). All were fitted with satellite tags.

Beaky was the first to arrive. Having nearly entered the county in March, he finally crossed into Northumberland on 15th April, and lived in the Border Forest, Kielder till 28th. At the same time, on 20th and 21st April Emily had a fly over Kielder and north to the Cheviots, before returning to Scotland.

Beaky then returned to Moffat, but soon returned to Northumberland on 13th May. This time he frequented the north of the county, in the Cheviot Hills, where he spent 3 months. Apart from the odd day trip down towards the Border Forest his time was spent in the north Cheviots, leaving on 3rd July to go back to Scotland.

With all this going on, another Golden Eagle was then recorded in May and September in the Border Forest, Kielder. This was a much older bird, almost certainly the same eagle recorded at Kielder in March 2017.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

After sightings of 2 males in our region in the spring of 2018 there were no records at all in 2019.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*



Simon Hitchen

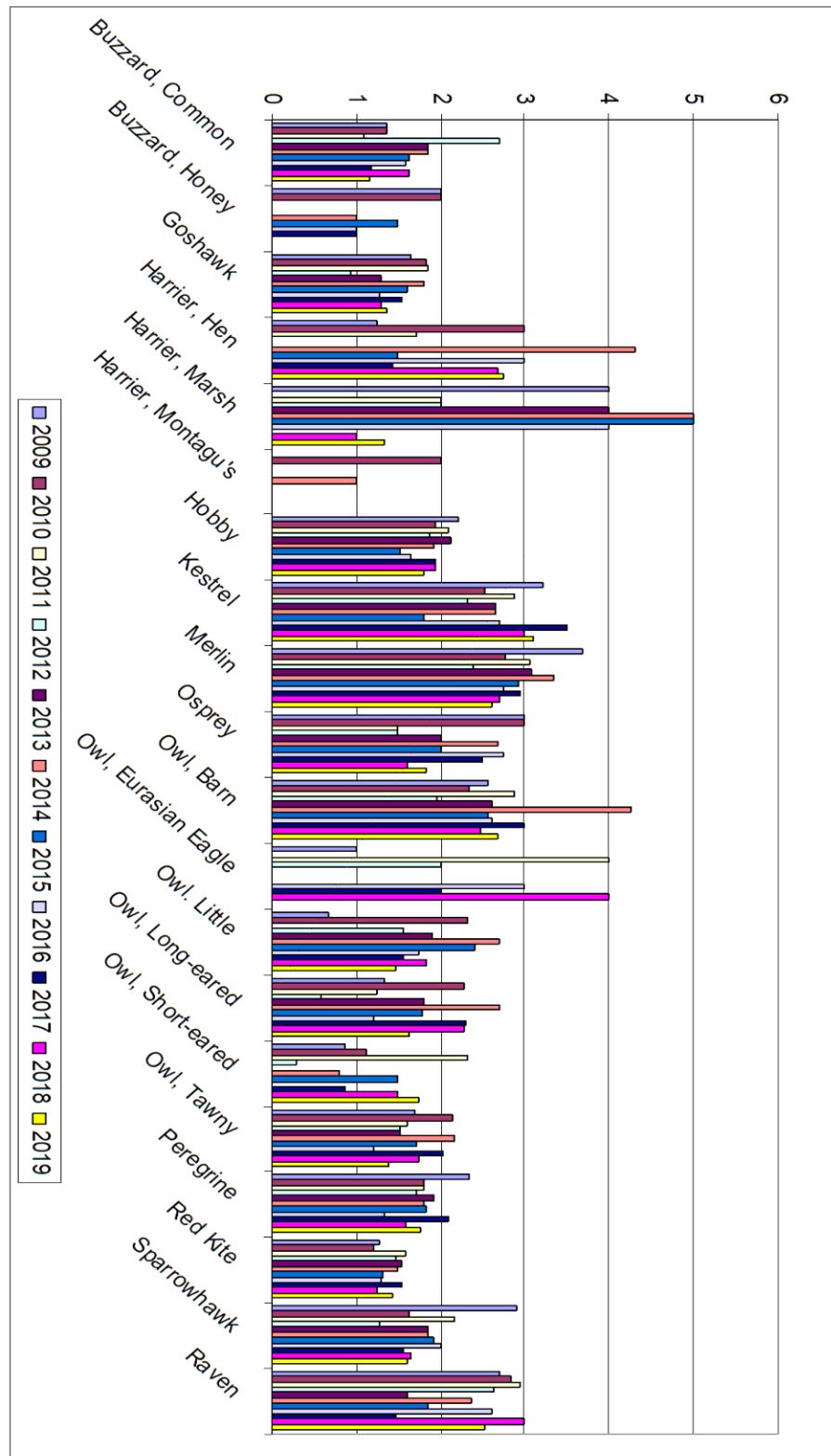
Not recorded by any of the Study Groups, but along the northern boundary of the North York Moors Upland Bird Study Group's area, reports from the Teesmouth Bird Club concerned up to 2 birds present between 12th January and 19th March, and then a single on 7th and 8th December at Scaling Dam.

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	7	6	1	0	6	6	6	5	11	1.83	1.83
Honey-buzzard	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sparrowhawk	84	56	0	4	36	35	32	29	56	1.60	1.56
Goshawk	133	78	9	6	65	65	49	37	67	1.37	1.03
Marsh Harrier	3	3	0	0	3	3	3	3	4	1.33	1.33
Hen Harrier	61	14	10	3	12	12	11	9	33	2.75	2.75
Red Kite	75	49	0	0	28	28	26	24	40	1.43	1.43
Buzzard	330	296	14	13	164	133	112	112	154	1.16	0.94
Barn Owl	1393	395	45	8	376	367	356	341	979	2.67	2.60
Tawny Owl	484	139	5	5	134	134	116	111	185	1.38	1.38
Little Owl	57	34	27	6	25	20	19	19	37	1.85	1.48
Long-eared Owl	55	15	3	2	13	13	11	11	21	1.62	1.62
Short-eared Owl	101	34	9	17	11	11	10	10	19	1.73	1.73
Eagle Owl	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kestrel	138	61	16	2	53	53	51	51	164	3.09	3.09
Merlin	270	123	7	13	107	103	96	87	268	2.60	2.51
Hobby	53	50	5	0	40	40	40	40	72	1.80	1.80
Peregrine	173	95	7	14	80	71	57	54	126	1.77	1.58
Raven	114	74	6	9	39	43	38	37	109	2.53	2.79
TOTAL	3543	1523	165	103	1193	1137	1033	980	2345		

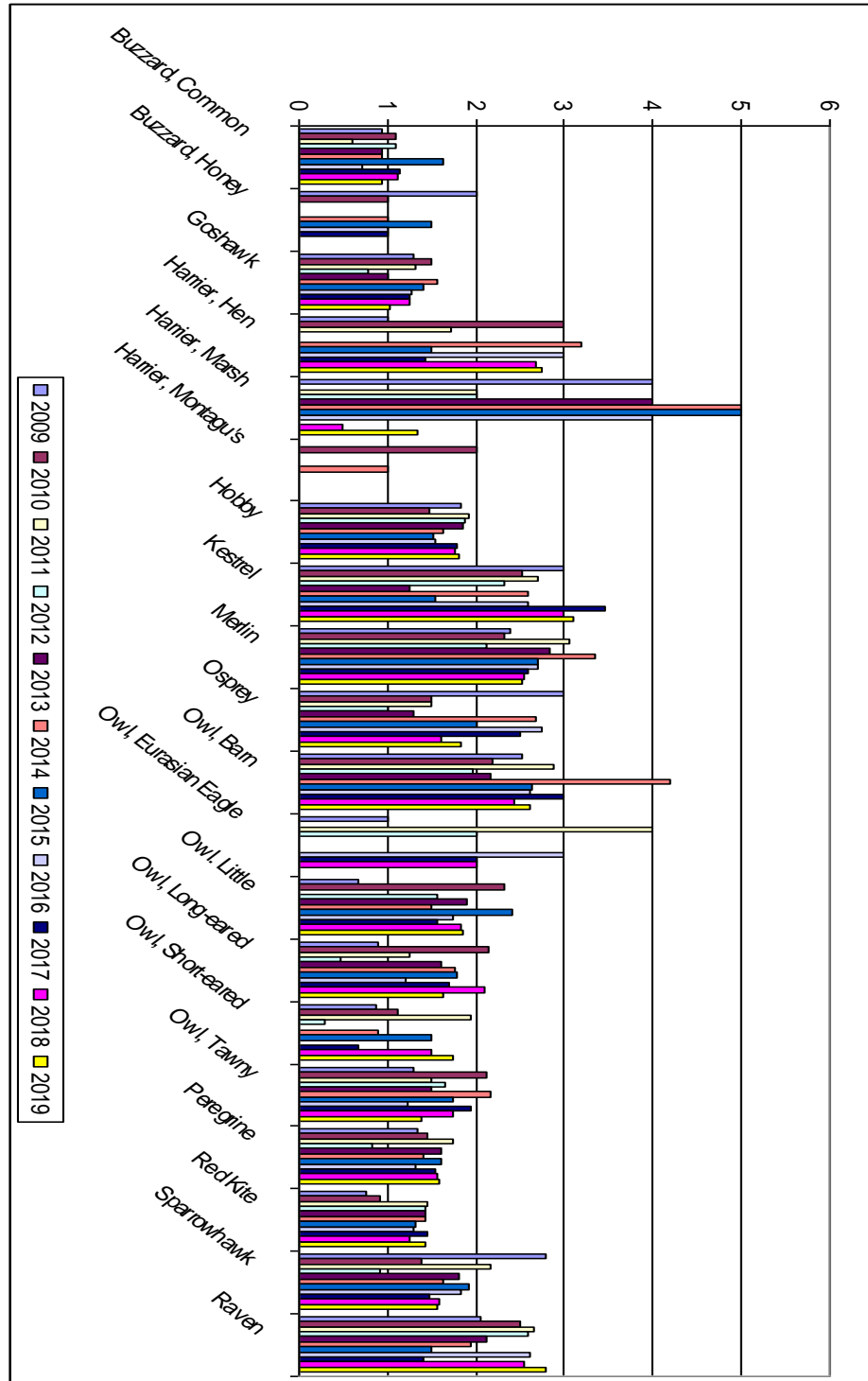
Appendix 2: Combined productivity graphs

a) young fledged per pair laying 2009-2018



Appendix 2: Combined productivity data

b) young fledged per territorial pair monitored 2009-2019



Appendix 3: Ring recoveries and colour ring sightings

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Duration	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
ChRSG	Barn Owl	GF66473	03/07/16	Nr Winsford	17/06/19	Eaton Hall	3yrs	30km	W	Breeding
ChRSG	Barn Owl	GV73060	07/07/2018	Monk's Heath	07/06/20	Chat Moss, Salford	2yrs	50km	NW	Breeding
MRG	Barn Owl	GV72129	12/06/18	Affetside nr Bury	31/05/19	Marchamley, Shropshire	353 days	92km	SSW	Breeding
MRG	Barn Owl	GV72125	12/06/18	Elton, Bury	16/06/19	Barton Moss, Salford	369 days	12km	SSW	Breeding
MRG	Barn Owl	GN74183	25/07/19	Four Gates, Bolton	16/10/19	Bryn, Wigan	84 days	10km	SW	RTA – died in care
MRG	Barn Owl	GN74192	25/07/19	Haigh, Wigan	27/11/19	Coppull, Lancs	125 days	8km	NW	Freshly dead under box
MRG	Barn Owl	GV90480	19/06/19	Norden, Rochdale	16/02/20	Bapchild, Sittingbourne, Kent	242 days	420km	SE	Freshly dead
MRG	Barn Owl	GC23930	20/06/19	Astley Moss, Wigan	26/04/20	Little Woolden Moss, Salford	311days	3km	S	Dead, not fresh
MRG	Barn Owl	GR72941	22/06/14	Sinderland, Trafford	14/10/19	Dunham Massey	5yrs 3m	0.5km	S	Controlled 2nd year running
NRG	Barn Owl	GV38471	29/05/17	Otterburn	07/06/19	Farmstone, Stirling	2yrs 1 m	163km	NNW	Dead in nest box
NRG	Barn Owl	GR10757	06/08/13	Redesdale	17/06/19	Falldon Hall Northumberland	5yrs 10m	86km	NNE	RTA
NRG	Barn Owl	GV18638	07/07/19	Big Waters NR Newcastle	24/09/19	Newcastle Airport	2m	7km	W	Dead, aircraft asualty
NRG	Barn Owl	GV81138	10/07/19	Tarset Burn, Kielder	31/10/19	Denwick, Northumberland	3m	51km	ENE	RTA
NRG	Barn Owl	GV18652	10/06/19	Ayckley Woods, Co.Durham	14/11/19	Carrville, Co. Durham	5m	3km	NE	RTA
NRG	Barn Owl	GV81311	13/06/18	Reaveley Greens, Northumberland	05/01/20	Lilbum Hill, Northumberland	1yr 7m	11km	N	Old infected leg fracture
NYMUBSG	Barn Owl	GV72167	27/06/18	Moorsholm, Redcar & Cleveland	02/02/19	Saltburn-by-the-Sea	220 days	8km	N	Freshly dead
NYMUBSG	Barn Owl	GV00661	26/06/17	Aislaby, N. Yorks	27/02/19	Nr Loftus, Redcar & Cleveland	611 days	18km	NW	Freshly dead, starved
NYMUBSG	Barn Owl	GV72180	03/07/18	Egton Flats, N. Yorks	15/01/19	High Waupley, Redcar & Cleveland	196 days	16km	NW	Dead, not fresh
NYMUBSG	Barn Owl	GY00413	14/07/19	Roxby,, N. Yorks	19/11/19	Ugthorpe, N. Yorks	128 days	3km	SE	RTA

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Duration	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV53827	22/06/18	Nr Pilsley, Derbs	08/01/19	Nr Sinfin, Derbs	200 days	34km	SE	RTA
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV59248	11/09/19	Slade Hooton, S. Yorks	22/10/19	Roche Abbey, S. Yorks	41 days	2km	E	RTA, in care
SPRSG & PDRMG	Buzzard	GV83477	13/06/18	Nr. Ladybower Resr, Derbs	08/06/19	Pen Y Cefn Uchaf, Denbighshire	360 days	104km	W	Freshly dead
NRG	Goshawk	HT96322	06/06/17	Kielder Forest, Northumberland	02/02/20	Longframlington, Northumberland	1yr 2m	41km	E	Dead
NYMUBSG	Goshawk	GC30348	03/06/12	Site confidential, North York Moors	18/07/19	Site confidential, North York Moors	7yrs 46 days	0km	-	Controlled
NRG	Hen Harrier	FH98474	14/07/16	Site confidential, Northumberland	26/01/17	Alnwick, Northumberland	6m	-	-	Dead, carcass had 2 healed shotgun wounds
NRG	Hen Harrier	FH87736	21/06/18	Site confidential, Northumberland	13/08/18	Fala, Midlothian	2m	-	-	Dead for more than a week
SPRSG & PDRMG	Hobby	EL61990	05/08/17	Nr Dodworth, S. Yorks	16/05/19	Eckington, Derbs	1yr 284 days	31km	E	In care
SPRSG & PDRMG	Hobby	EY03640	28/07/18	Nr Emley, W. Yorks	11/07/19	Settiner See, Gohren, Germany	348 days	873km	E	In care, later released
MRG	Kestrel	EY02673	03/06/17	Flixton	26/06/19	Acton Bridge, Northwich	2yrs 23 days	23km	SW	RTA
MRG	Kestrel	EZ22975	02/06/18	Ainsworth,, Bury	07/01/19	Rochdale	7m 3days	15km	ENE	RTA
MRG	Kestrel	EZ07657	01/06/17	Billinge, nr St Helens	04/02/20	Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside	2yrs 248days	10km	SE	Into care, released
NYMUBSG	Kestrel	EW58703	25/05/18	Little Findowie, Perth & Kinross	13/02/19	Goathland, North Yorks	264days	304km	SE	Dead, not fresh
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EY03990	01/07/14	Lady Field, S. Yorks	06/05/19	Lindrick Common, S. Yorks	4yrs 309 days	4km	E	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EY03790	25/05/17	Hathersage, Derbs	25/01/19	Chapel-en-le-Frith	1yr 245days	18km	W	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EY03550	13/06/17	Beightonfields Priory, Derbs	06/01/19	Lindrick Dale, Worksop, S. Yorks	1yr 207 days	12km	E	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EA12567	17/06/19	Swinston Hill Wood, S. Yorks	19/10/19	Letwell, S. Yorks	124 days	3km	ENE	Dead

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Duration	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
NRG	Little Owl	EZ83579	05/06/18	Big Waters NR, Newcastle	23/05/19	Big Waters NR, Newcastle	11m	-	-	Controlled
SPRSG &PDRMG	Long-eared Owl	GV25394	09/08/18	Ash Cabinn Flat, S.Yorks	22/06/19	Ringinglow. Sheffield	317days	4km	NW	Controlled
NYMUBSG	Merlin	EX13320	11/07/19	Site confidential, North York Moors	08/08/19	Scarborough	28days	29km	ESE	Killed, hit patio door
SPRSG &PDRMG	Merlin	EX36253	22/06/11	Nr Derwent Resr, Derbs	18/04/19	Tum Edge, Flash, Staffs	7yrs 300days	30km	S	Freshly dead
SPRSG &PDRMG	Merlin	EY33545	16/06/14	Nr Hawksworth Moor, W. Yorks	06/06/19	Nr Holmbridge, W. Yorks	4yrs 355 days	38km	S	Long dead
SPRSG &PDRMG	Merlin	EY03616	22/06/18	Nr Holmfirth, W. Yorks	10/04/19	Chelworth, Wilts	292 days	212km	S	Long dead
SPRSG &PDRMG	Merlin	DD47979	18/06/19	Nr Catshaw, S, Yorks	11/11/19	Kidlington, Oxon	146 days	192km	S	Freshly dead
SPRSG &PDRMG	Merlin	EZ54326	18/06/19	Nr Catshaw, S, Yorks	28/10/19	Holme Bird Obs, Norfolk	132 days	158km	ESE	Controlled
MRG	Peregrine	GV11690 (colour ring RA)	09/06/15	CIS tower, Manchester city centre	15/04/19	Site confidential. Manchester city centre	3yrs 310 days	-	-	Dead, for cause see text.
MRG	Peregrine	TP (m) colour ring	22/05/17	St George's church Chorley	April 2019	St Mary's church Nelson	2yrs	44km	NE	Bred successfully 2020
MRG	Peregrine	TN (f) colour ring	22/05/17	St George's church Chorley	03/06/19	Chorley town centre	2yrs 12 days	-	-	Did not breed
MRG	Peregrine	GV92109 VR(m) colour ring	10/05/18	Leigh Spinners mill. Leigh	25/08/18 to Feb 19 at least	Audenshaw Resrs	107 days	36km	E	Ring read in field
MRG	Peregrine	GR93089 Ringed in care	12/06/17	Bolton Town Hall	24/05/19	Site confidential, nr Bolton	1yr 346 days	15km	-	Bred successfully
MRG	Peregrine	GV83469 TVF (ringed in care)	June 2019	Ancoats, Manchester	27/06/19	Fiddlers Ferry power station	Approx 14 days	53km	W	In permanent care with heart murmur
MRG	Peregrine	GV90458 1A (m) colour ring	16/05/19	Trencherfield Mill, Wigan	02/10/19	Little Woolden Moss	139 days	16km	SE	Ring read in field
MRG	Peregrine	GV90460 3A (m) colour ring	16/05/19	Trencherfield Mill, Wigan	27/11/19	Attingham Park Shrewsbury	195 days	100km	S	Ring read in field
SPRSG &PDRMG	Peregrine	GR36981	01/06/16	Nr Greenfield, Gtr Manchester	27/02/19	Nr Hyde, Gtr Manchester	2yrs 271 days	10km	SW	Freshly dead

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Duration	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
SPRSG &PDRMG	Peregrine	GV00098	28/05/18	St George's church Netherthorpe Sheffield	29/01/19	Wath upon Dearne, S. Yorks	243 days	17km	SSE	Ring read in field
SPRSG &PDRMG	Peregrine	GR36994	02/06/18	Wakefield	21/07/19	Ossett, W. Yorks	1yr 49 days	6km	W	Ring read in field
MRG	Sparrowhawk	DT65301	22/09/18	Smithills, Bolton	13/02/19	Belmont, nr Bolton	4m 22days	3km	NW	RTA
NRG	Sparrowhawk	DA62296	24/09/18	Hauxley, Northumberland	18/02/19	Silvers Carr, Northumberland	6m	Less than 1km	SSW	Long dead
SPRSG &PDRMG	Sparrowhawk	EY03663	24/05/15	Williamthorpe, Derbs	25/02/19	Carlton, N. Yorks	3yrs 277days	62km	N	Long dead
MRG	Tawny Owl	GV60443	28/05/19	Dunham Massey	09/12/19	Dunham Massey Hall	6m 11days	-	-	RTA
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC09320	09/05/07	Coniston, Cumbria	17/05/19	Grizedale Forest,, Cumbria	12yrs	4km	WSW	Controlled
NRG	Tawny Owl	GN19291	06/05/05	Hawkshead, Cumbria	09/06/19	Grizedale Forest,, Cumbria	14yrs 1m	3km	NNE	Controlled
SPRSG &PDRMG	Tawny Owl	GC47345	10/05/14	Rhodeswood Resr nr Glossop	03/11/19	Whitefield, Gtr Manchester	5yrs 5m 24days	35km	NW	Injured

Hen Harrier Day 11th August 2019 Carsington Water



Members of the Bowland RSG



The Wild Justice directors (L-R Ruth Tingay, Mark Avery, Chris Packham)

Chester conference 23rd November 2019
Our speakers



Andrew Village



Alan Fielding



Colin Shawyer



James Aldred



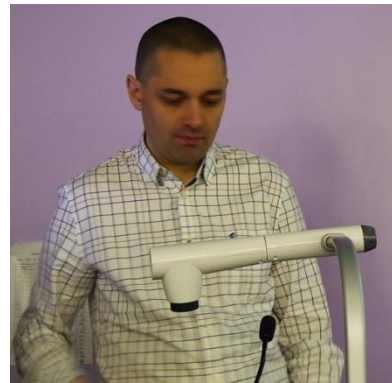
Leo Smith



Graham Jones



Roy Leigh



Supt. Nick Lyall

Northern England Raptor Forum contact list

Bowland Raptor Study Group

Bill Murphy murphybill70@yahoo.com
Bill Hesketh bill.hesketh@blueyonder.co.uk

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Steve Downing throstlebower@hotmail.com
Tim Walker tim@theoldbridgeinn.co.uk

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Roy S. Leigh roy@leighecology.co.uk
Jimmi Hill jimmihill1@gmail.com

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

David Raw davidrawdubsg@aol.com
Tony Armstrong alpha39@btinternet.com

Friends of Red Kites

Ken Sanderson kenandann.sanderson@talktalk.net
Allan Witherington milvus2@outlook.com

Manchester Raptor Group

Judith Smith ajudithsmith@gmail.com
Chris Sutton chrissutton42@gmail.com

Northumbria Ringing Group

Martin Davison martindavison3@gmail.com
Paul Galloway galloway.p@sky.com

North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Simon Bassindale nymmerlin@btinternet.com
Wilf Norman wilfgros@btinternet.com

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

Steve Davies stevedav56@icloud.com
Mike Price mike.price2009@yahoo.com

South Peak Raptor Study Group

Mick Taylor micktaylor@btinternet.com
Trevor Grimshaw grimshaw758@btinternet.com

Northern England Raptor Forum

Steve Downing, Chairman
David Raw, Secretary

Northern England Raptor Forum, c/o 25 Pinewood Crescent, Heighington, Co. Durham DL5
6RR