

# Northern England Raptor Forum



**Annual Review 2020**

# Northern England Raptor Forum

## Annual Review 2020



*Speaking for Birds of Prey with One Voice*

## Acknowledgements

The production of this, the twelfth Northern England Raptor Forum Annual Review, is the result of the collaborative efforts by the members of each of the constituent NERF Groups who have kindly shared their data with the Forum.

We would like to express our thanks to all the individuals who allowed us to use their photographs, and to Wilf Norman who again proof-read the Review and made many helpful suggestions.

## Northern England Raptor Forum

Steve Downing, Chairman

David Raw, Secretary

Steve Davies, Treasurer

Judith Smith, Editor

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Bowland Raptor Study Group

Calderdale Raptor Study Group

Cheshire Raptor Study Group

Durham Upland Bird Study Group

Friends of Red Kites

Manchester Raptor Group

Northumbria Ringing Group

North York Moors Upland Bird (Merlin) Study Group

Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

South Peak Raptor Study Group

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The Northern England Raptor Forum is supported by:

**Northern England Raptor Forum - working in  
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## Photographs:

**Front cover** – Bearded Vulture, Crowden, Peak District (*Pete Hines*)

**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](mailto: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](mailto:pbms@ceh.ac.uk) or the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme [WIIS] telephone 0800 321600.

The information should also be passed on to the RSPB Investigations Team telephone 01767 680551 or email [crime@rspb.org.uk](mailto: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

Dr Mark Avery, Director, Wild Justice

Let us consider the Red Kite – a massive conservation success story.

I saw my first Red Kite on a family holiday when I was about 12 years old. It was far away



over a Welsh hillside and I watched it through my first pair of binoculars until my eyes watered. I needed to be sure that its tail really was forked. I couldn't see that the tail was orange, nor that the underwing had white and black patches but I did notice the bird flew differently from a Buzzard, with its longer wings drooped rather than upturned and with an ease which made Buzzards look stolid.

Maybe a decade later, while birding in Norfolk I saw a Red Kite and it was a rare bird – probably of continental origin and the best bird of the day.

Scroll on another decade or more and I was working for the RSPB and Red Kites were being released in locations in the east of England and Scotland. Would they survive? Enough of them did to make a drive up the A1 these days a kite-rich journey.

My children grew up with Red Kites as part of their normal lives, over the school playground, seen from the car while travelling to football matches and just always there. The new unitary authority of North Northamptonshire needed a logo, and we, the public, voted for a Red Kite to be part of that symbol.

The nearest kite nest to my house is within a mile and Red Kites are over the garden every day.

Red Kites aren't everywhere, and the gaps in range are mostly down to persecution, but the public understand that too. I stayed in Bowland a while back and the woman who brought me my breakfast told me she loved Red Kites, and that although they weren't too far away, they weren't in Bowland because they are killed in Nidderdale, especially on grouse moors. She knew Red Kites, wanted Red Kites and knew why she wasn't getting Red Kites. I'm sure she'll get them fairly soon.

I salute the work done by volunteer dedicated raptor workers in helping to deliver those successes for Red Kites and some other raptor species. There's more to do, but these are real successes to be celebrated.

But since there is more to do, may I make one point about how you can all make sure that your fieldwork has maximum impact.

Not to put too fine a point on it; data in dead people's notebooks don't help raptors. Data shared and used and published helps raptors. One of the greatest achievements of NERF was the essential part that its members played in the 2011 paper on Peregrines in Northern

England published in *Biological Conservation*. That was a great dataset whose power came from its breadth and depth, and the work of many. What other stories could your pooled and analysed data tell? Please give it some thought.

Thanks for all that you do.

Mark

## Chairman's Report: September 2020- August 2021



Welcome to the 2020 NERF Annual Review. The main body of this Review follows the traditional format that we have used in all of our previous reports, and in normal times I would immediately start my report discussing issues pertaining to birds of prey. However; I would be remiss if I didn't start by commenting on the Covid-19 pandemic that continues to blight every corner of the planet. As I type this report epidemiologists calculate that globally approximately 5 million people have died from the disease. Approximately 150,000 of those deaths have occurred in the UK. Many, if not all, of our supporters will have known someone who has succumbed to the disease and our thoughts and sympathies go out to their families and friends.

The 2019 breeding season ended as usual with an excellent NERF annual conference in November; on that occasion hosted by Cheshire Raptor Study Group at Chester University. With the successful conference over, NERF Raptor Workers should have been able to relax a little and resume a 'normal' family life for the next 4 months or so. Little did we know as we all drove home from the conference that life would never be 'normal' again and eventually we would learn a new phrase. In the future our lives would be dictated by – 'the new normal'.

By the end of 2019 a previously unknown corona virus named Covid-19 was out of control rampaging through Wuhan City, China where it was first identified. The virus quickly moved around the globe and on 23 March 2020 the Prime Minister announced that the first national lockdown was being imposed. This was an unprecedented move by the Government in peace time and worse was to come over the next two years. As a consequence of the pandemic the BTO took a no doubt difficult, but absolutely correct decision to suspend all ringing and nest monitoring activities across the UK. Taking into account everything else that was happening in the country this decision did not come as a complete surprise.

In April the Government accepted that the lockdown could have a detrimental impact on the public's wellbeing and they eased lockdown a little. It became possible to undertake limited outdoor exercise and to take the family dog for daily exercise. However; it had to be from door to door. There could be no driving to the countryside to seek open space and the Police were empowered to fine to anyone who breached the rules.

As the national lockdown was eased for the first time, the BTO permitted limited local ringing and monitoring activities. However; the British Mountaineering Council strongly advised walkers and climbers to stay away from the hills and the Mountain Rescue

Organisations warned that all rescue services had been suspended. Having spent a lifetime rock climbing and mountaineering I was all too well aware that a small stumble could have catastrophic consequences that would see an increased demand on the Air Ambulance Service, the Ambulance Service and hospitals. That would have been irresponsible and I, along with many other Raptor Workers, took the decision not to ring Raven or Peregrine, both of which would require abseiling into the nests. It was immediately obvious that the 2020 data collected by NERF would not accurately reflect the actual populations; but that was of little consequence when considering the dire situation that our friends and neighbours were facing.

On 5th April I received a phone call from Tim Mackrill, an ornithologist with the Roy Dennis Foundation. Tim works in partnership with Steve Edgerton-Read of Forestry England on a project to reintroduce White-tailed Eagles on the Isle of Wight. He told me that two of their birds, imaginatively called G393 and G318, had been fitted with satellite tags and they had been tracked to the North York Moors. Tim was well aware that North Yorkshire was a hotspot for raptor persecution and he asked if NERF could help monitor the birds. That wouldn't be a problem in normal times; however April 2020 was far from normal. Raptor workers had their licences restricted and all but local exercise was prohibited by law. Despite these considerable constraints with members scattered across the North of England NERF was uniquely positioned to help. We agreed that Tim would send me daily updates of the two birds' movements. I would then analyse the satellite tracks and mobilise the nearest NERF member in 'local' walking distance of the last known fix. Using this system we were able to monitor and protect the pair until they turned south and left the NERF area. A full account of the journeys taken by G393 and G318 can be read in the report by Dr Tim Mackrill and Wilf Norman (p.118).

During the lockdown the Government identified several activities that constituted 'critical work'. After a great deal of consultation with the relevant authorities it was agreed that because the persecution of Hen Harriers, a national wildlife crime priority, remained a constant threat, the monitoring of the species fitted the criteria of 'critical work' and satellite tagging was allowed to resume. The end of the Hen Harrier breeding season revealed that 60 chicks had fledged from 19 nests [average 3.2 chicks per nest] spread across the North of England. In 2021 we saw another welcome increase in both successful nesting attempts, 31, and the number of chicks fledging, 84. However, the average number of chicks fledging per nest fell from 3.2 to 2.7.

Whilst this news was welcomed the data has to be put into context. Independent research reveals that there is sufficient suitable habitat in the North of England for in excess of 300 breeding pairs capable of producing more than 1000 young per year. It is also worth remembering that in both 2020 and 2021 chicks were brood managed by Natural England. Brood management is a Government policy that allows grouse moor owners to have the young from a Hen Harrier nest taken into captivity to be reared and later released on a different grouse moor if there is a second nest within 10 kilometres. It is NERF's policy to oppose brood management. The scheme is currently being challenged in the High Court by Dr. Mark Avery and the RSPB. It is self-evident that there is a long way to go before any acceptable level of breeding and fledging success can be shouted from the moor tops.

The persecution of Hen Harriers continues to blight our northern uplands both at breeding sites and as birds disperse from their natal areas. Satellite-tagged birds disappear without trace when their tags suddenly and inexplicably stop working; a failure known as 'stop no



malfunction' [SNM]. The appalling level of SNM, using data supplied by Natural England, was set out in a peer review paper – Murgatroyd, M. *et al.* 2019. Nature Communication. <http://go.nature.com/2JuoRfo> In that paper Murgatroyd reported that 72% of satellite tagged birds disappeared without trace when they spent the last week of their lives on, or near, a grouse moor. Using that data it is not unreasonable to assume that 72% of untagged birds, which represents 3 times more individuals, have disappeared in similar circumstances. Even though we see evidence of this annually whilst we monitor both the breeding sites and the winter roosts, reading it in a paper written by well-respected ornithologists is truly shocking. Further corroboration that persecution is a persistent problem can be inferred by the fact that the majority of successful nests remain stubbornly rooted on Forestry England land in the Kielder Forest and on the United Utilities Estate in the Forest of Bowland. Additionally, photographic evidence obtained on the United Utilities Estate during the 2021 breeding season revealed that of the 17 adults photographed 8 were not ringed. The male from a successful nest on National Trust property was also unringed. NERF members and independent Raptor Workers invest a huge amount of time and effort annually surveying the northern uplands for breeding Hen Harriers and it is extremely unlikely that nests go undetected. Every chick located by NERF and the RSPB is fitted with a BTO metal ring and a unique colour ring on the other leg; it is therefore very surprising to find that 9 of the 19 breeding adults, photographed were not ringed. This strongly suggests that the breeding birds in England are formed from a sink population.

Throughout 2020 we had all been subjected to various levels of lockdown, interspersed with the freedom to leave our homes; however the number of deaths and hospitalisations due to the Covid-19 pandemic remained stubbornly high. NERF has held an Annual Conference for more than a decade and we have a dedicated a group of supporters for whom we have a duty of care when they attend our conferences. Taking all of these factors into account the NERF management team took the decision to cancel our annual conference.

NorthYorkshire has had the unenviable reputation of being the county with the highest level of raptor persecution in England, including the killing of Hen Harriers, for more than a decade. Towards the end of November, Dean Beswick, one of our colleagues from the Nidderdale Raptor Study Group, approached NERF with a plan to raise funding to purchase satellite tags to be used in the RSPB's Hen Harrier Project. After a short meeting between the Nidderdale RSG, NERF and Jack Ashton-Booth, RSPB Investigations Officer, with responsibility for Hen Harriers, we were ready to launch the scheme.

The plan had three parts; firstly Dean's friend, Dan Evans a fine artist, would produce a spectacular painting of a Hen Harrier in flight carrying prey, which would be donated to the



cause. The original painting would be auctioned and sold to the highest bidder. This was an incredibly generous offer.

Secondly; Dan would produce a limited number of prints in two sizes, which could be purchased directly from him through his website – <https://danevans.art/shp/prints> , with all of the profits being passed to the scheme. Thirdly; the general public

and local conservation organisations would be invited to contribute to the scheme via a JustGiving page. The support for all three elements of the scheme was incredible with in excess of £9,000 raised during late winter and spring 2021; this was sufficient to purchase 3 tags, which were deployed during the 2021 Hen Harrier breeding season.

Copies of prints are still available and can be purchased directly from Dan via his website.

The past 18 months have been extremely distressing for everyone and we can only hope that 2022 will bring relief from this dreadful disease.

Steve Downing  
*Chairman*  
*October 2021*

## Secretary's Report: September 2020- August 2021



Since our formation in 2006, the Northern England Raptor Forum has published twelve consecutive Annual Reviews which we believe provide a unique and comprehensive data set describing the fortunes of key raptor species in the northern uplands. Our Reviews demonstrate the commitment of members to their fieldwork and, through this, their collection of evidence-based records. Such independently verified data can be used with confidence to help inform species and habitat conservation measures and to contribute to the debate surrounding species protection. The collective field effort was once again impressive this year given the continued access restrictions (Covid) during the important early part of the season.

The core membership of NERF is the ten raptor study groups, as set out in this review. Through our advisors we also receive additional contributions from the Shropshire RSG, the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Washburn area of the Nidderdale AONB.

The "Roll of Honour" section of our website ([raptorforum.co.uk](http://raptorforum.co.uk)) details our appreciation of the huge contribution of two stalwarts to raptor conservations who have both made significant contributions. Trevor Grimshaw has retired as chair of the South Peak RSG and has stepped down from his NERF responsibilities. Trevor was a founding member of NERF and has always had an enviable reputation for his studies of Peregrine in particular. We wish him well and welcome Kim Leyland who now represents SPRSG. Several NERF groups have had the pleasure of working closely with James Bray, RSPB Officer, Forest of Bowland who has now left the area to take up a new post. It is good to see Hen Harriers regaining their

rightful place in Bowland thanks in no small way to James' strong and persistent endeavours. His involvement in support of the Bowland RSG has been greatly appreciated.

The past year has continued to be dominated by the concerns and constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic. The usual scheduled meetings of members have all been cancelled and replaced by a series of Zoom calls and email exchanges which have allowed business to continue but which, of course, cannot fully substitute for the benefits of meetings friends and colleagues face to face. We have also made the difficult decision to cancel the North of England Raptor Conference for a second successive year. This decision means that in the absence of obvious outlets at conference for the present Annual Review it has not been printed, as a preferred hard copy, but instead it is made available immediately on our website.

We hope to resume our normal conference programme in 2022 when thanks to a generous personal donation we will be pleased to be able to offer a significant fee reduction to young-person delegates, aged 25 and under.

Our website shows links under 'Public Statements' to our responses to a range of conservation and persecution issues arising during the past 12 months. These have included our assessment of the 2020 breeding season for Hen Harrier in response to a statement issued by Natural England, comments on how Scotland may be moving closer to grouse moor management, the continuing persecution of raptors under the cloak of lockdown and recognition of an important report from Natural England confirming that breeding Peregrines in the northern uplands are missing due to illegal persecution and disturbance.

NERF members continue to monitor and report on Hen Harriers throughout the year and conducted a repeat series of co-ordinated roost counts over the late winter period in 2020.

David Raw  
*Secretary to NERF, Sept 2021*

## **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.

### **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](http://www.pdrmg.co.uk)

**South Peak Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:**

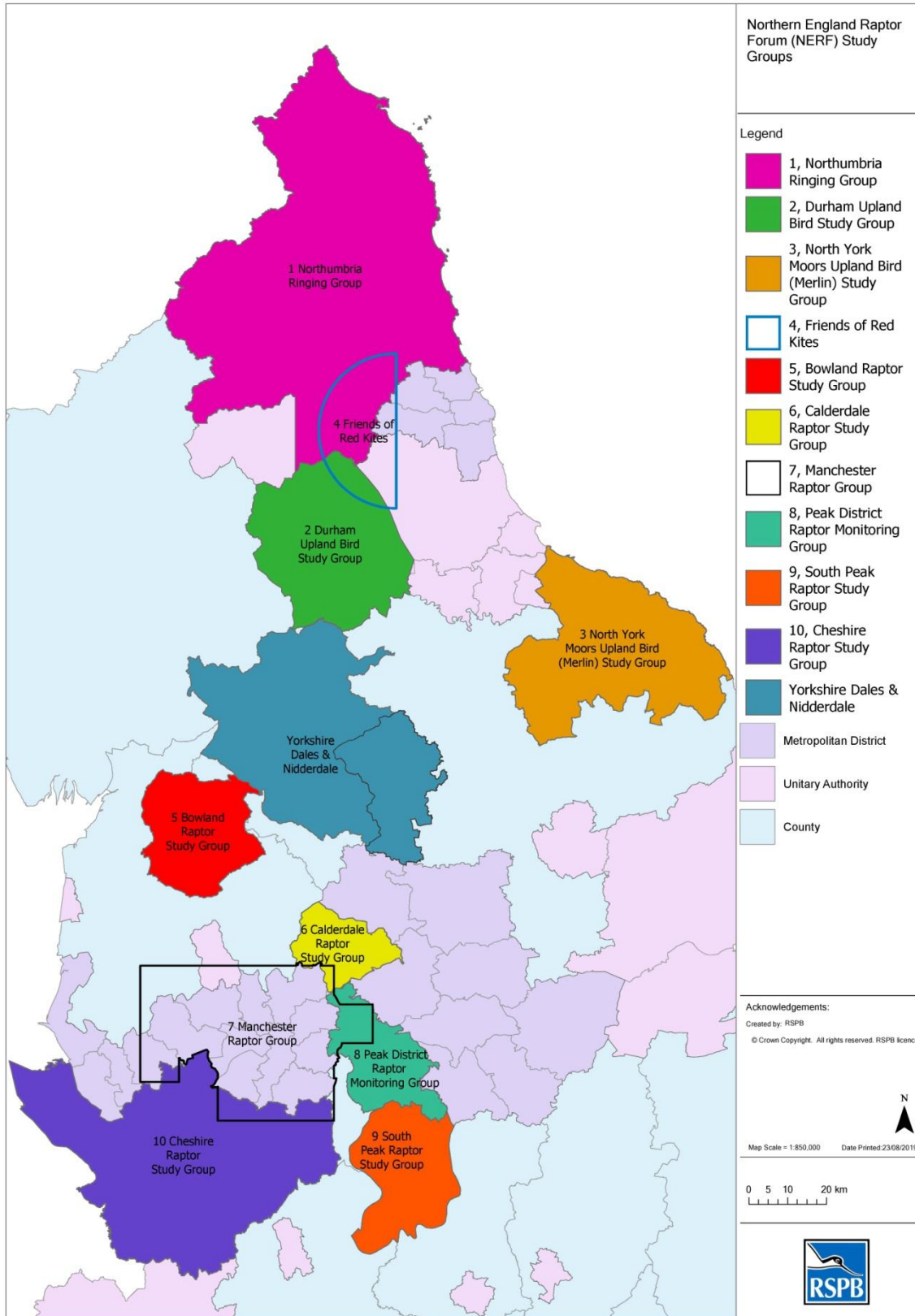
*In the north:* National Trust land in the upper Derwent valley, west to the R. Alport and east to the National Trust boundary.

*In the south:* all of the White Peak, with the exception of the Goyt valley. Includes the Staffordshire Moors, Eastern Moors, North Lees Estate, Chatsworth Estate and the Haddon Estate. In addition the Group covers central Derbyshire as far as the Nottinghamshire border and south Derbyshire (mainly Hobby).

**Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale**

**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.

\*\*\*\*\*8



*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 ongoing 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.16 graphically indicates the level of monitoring undertaken by NERF. Analyses of the species 'breeding & monitored' / 'breeding & not monitored' / 'absent' / 'passage' data, identify the areas in which NERF will be able to focus future monitoring efforts more effectively. This will provide an opportunity to expand the overall dataset in a more meaningful way. This improved dataset, when combined with the persecution dataset will be used to set and / or modify NERF's monitoring priorities over time.

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

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

## Species monitored by NERF

GROUP																					
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



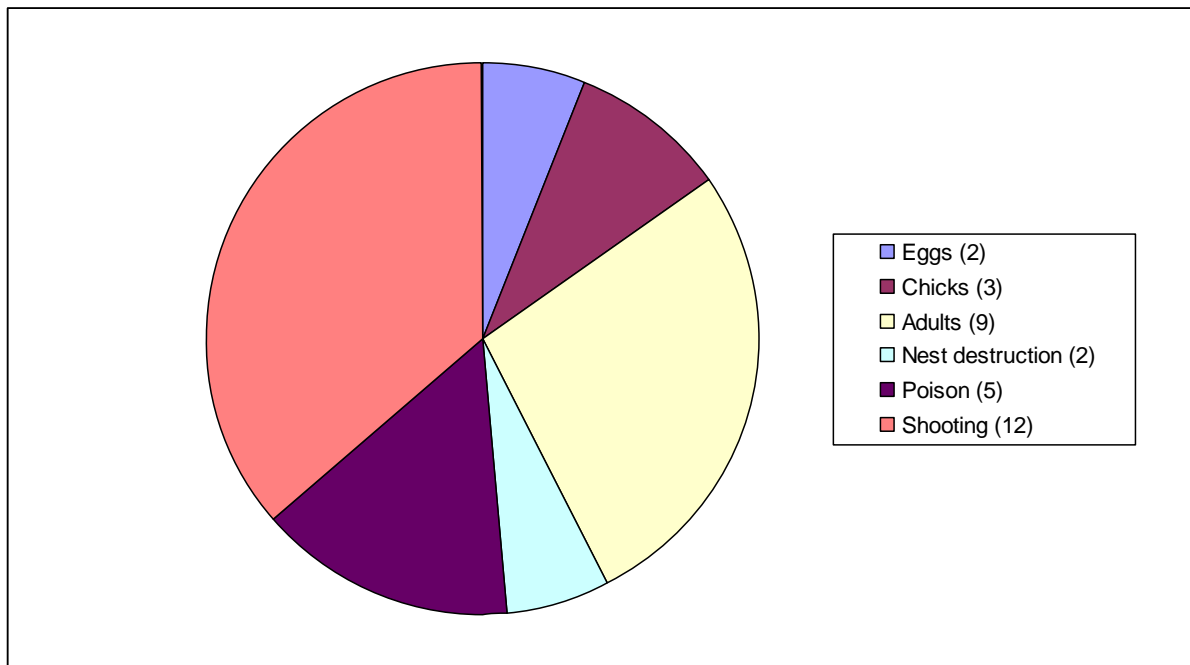
## NERF regional persecution data

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 2020 was 34, over twice that recorded last year, and the highest total since 2016. Particularly disturbing was the increase in poisons and persecution of adults. Since 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, and probably represent the tip of the iceberg..

### Persecution by type 2020 *(figures in parentheses refer to number of incidents)*

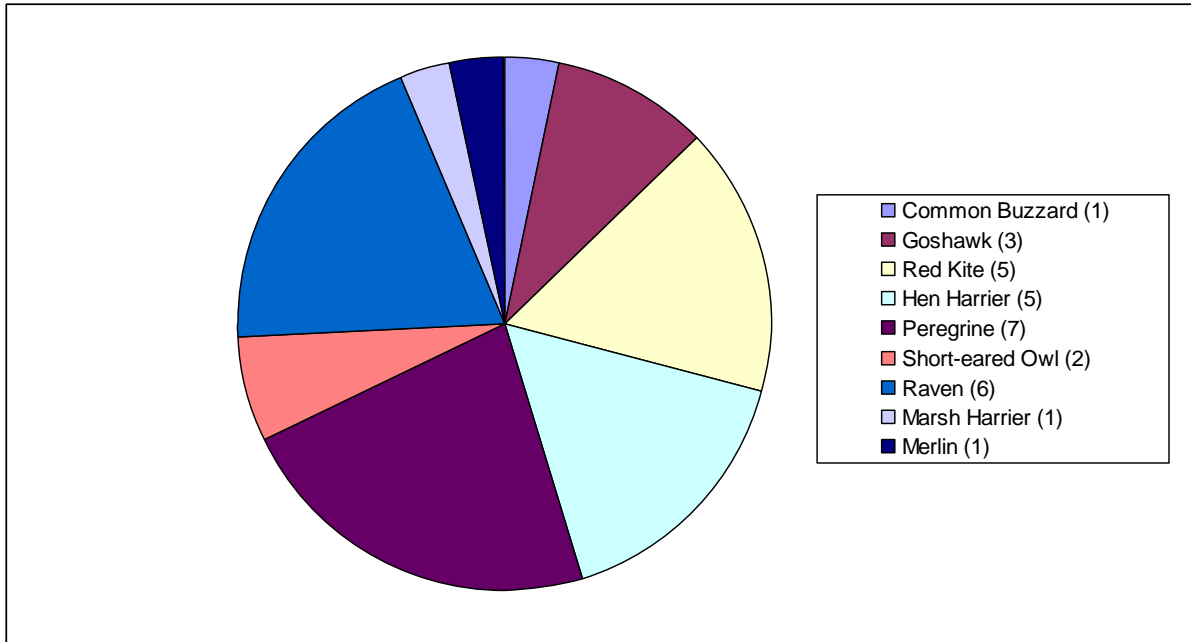


## Black Hole species

During 2020 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. 2020 figures are slightly down on 2019 at 31(36 in 2019) but the trend was the same with Peregrine again heading the list. It is disturbing to see that Merlin has re-entered the chart – last included in 2017.

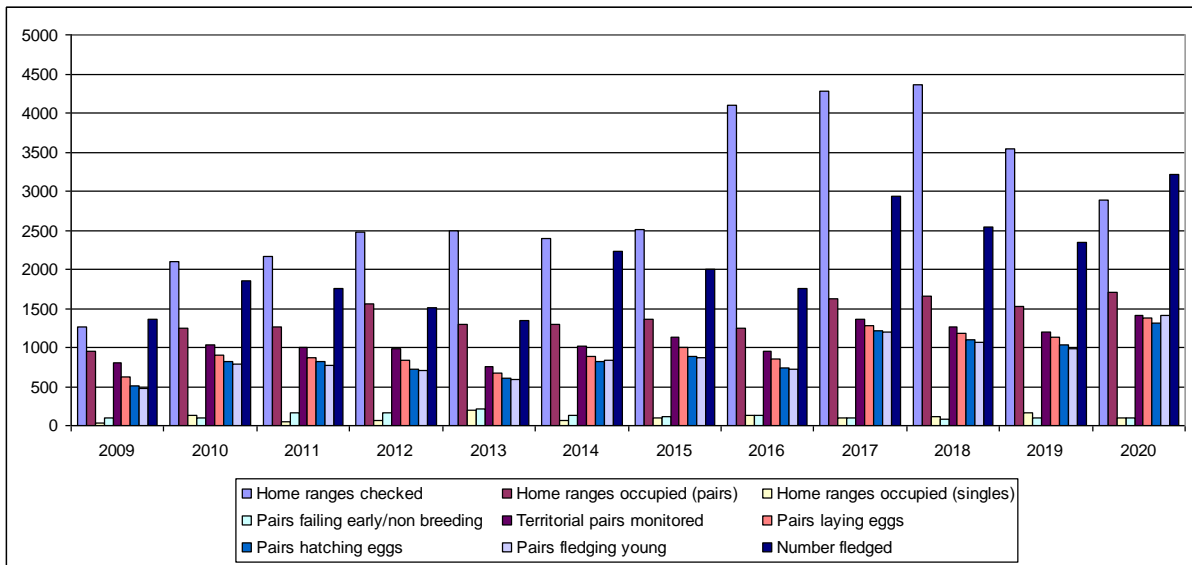
**Black Hole species in 2020 (figures in parentheses refer to number of groups listing species)**



**Summary**

Within the NERF region 20 raptor species were monitored and / or recorded by Group members during 2019. Additionally this year, there were records for Bearded Vulture, 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 20 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 - 2020 are presented in the table following.

## Combined statistics 2009-2020



Covid-19's effect on the number of *Home Ranges Checked* was not as great as had been feared initially, except in the Cheshire RSG area. Almost every species showed an increase in the total number of chicks fledged, and where there was a decline – just 3 species – it was negligible. This was probably due to the long spell of fine warm weather in spring which began in March and lasted until May - the sunniest on record and the 5th warmest and driest since 1919. This followed the wettest February on record, so despite the prolonged dry weather, groundwater levels were high and vegetation growth unaffected. The number of *Young fledged per Pair Laying* was also up for most species, Raven being a notable exception, but this bird is a very early breeder and perhaps did not benefit from the excellent spring weather.

A side-effect of the dry weather was that under Covid-19 regulations, many people on furlough took the opportunity to walk in the countryside for the first time, probably causing some disturbance to ground-nesting species. One result was that rescue centres received many branched Tawny Owl chicks believed to have been abandoned!

Summer was warmer, wetter and duller than average, although all three months had hot spells.

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 the inside back cover.

# Species reports

## Editor's note:

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

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

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

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

## COVID-19

To reflect the effect of Covid-19 restrictions on fieldwork, a Covid Impact Score was formulated and distributed to species editors, with rating of 1 to 4, and applied to each group's account. The explanations of the scores are as follows:

1. Normal or near normal monitoring, no significant impact.
2. Some impact on coverage (early season visits and/or area surveyed).
3. Significant impact (early season visits and/or area surveyed).
4. Covid prevented all monitoring.

## Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*



Pete Richman

### UK population estimate

196-236 breeding pairs were estimated in the UK in 2019 by RBBP with a 207% increase over the last 25 years (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704). APEP 4 estimates 240 pairs, 2013-17 (Woodward I. *et al.* 2020. APEP 4: *British Birds* 113: 69-104) 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* 110:502-517)

### National and regional threat assessment

With the growing population of Ospreys throughout the UK, either from the birds naturally spreading into new areas or with translocation of birds to new areas, the British public is going to start coming into contact more and more with these exciting birds, which is a great thing!

If the public can see the birds fishing, and even better at a nest, they will feel connected and want to protect them.

But there will be problems with some, who perceive the Osprey as a threat to fish or fish stocks. But fortunately, most fishermen, bailiffs, gamekeepers seem to like Ospreys so hopefully, the problems will be few and not a problem to birds which want to expand to breed in England.

## 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	5	5	10	1.67	1.67

## 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

Several Ospreys are seen in Bowland annually, usually passing through. Occasional individuals do linger for a few days at Stocks Reservoir, but so far always on their own. A pair held territory and built a nest on the edge of Bowland in 2020, though this was not in the group's study area. They were young birds and the female was not thought to have laid eggs.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Ospreys are observed annually in low numbers as they transit across the study area on migration in both spring and autumn. In stark contrast to the group's inability to monitor other raptor species due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions the number of individuals recorded increased by 500% from 2 in 2019 to 10 in 2020.

This can probably be best explained by the fact that the two main valleys in Calderdale run west to east and the migration route is south to north in spring and reversed in autumn. During the periods of 'lockdown' Group members spent more time at, or near, home in the valleys rather than monitoring the more remote upland areas of the study area and this fact may have given more opportunities to record birds on passage rather than an actual increase in the number of birds that are normally observed.

Overall there were 11 sightings of 10 individuals during 2020. There were a total of 8 records in spring; 7 sightings in April and 1 in May. Three birds were recorded on the southern migration; 1 in August, 1 in September and the 3rd in October.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

Northward passage calling at various Cheshire meres commenced on March 25th, latest 9th May. Return sighting commenced from 20th August to October 1st.

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

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The usual records of early spring passage were significantly reduced until mid May due to Covid restrictions. The first report of a bird moving north came from the coast on 4th April though doubtless other birds will have gone before.

As in prior years, 1-2 birds were seen regularly around Derwent Reservoir during the summer, most especially from mid June through to early September but there was no evidence of breeding. The reservoirs in Lunedale and Baldersdale attracted occasional single roaming birds on 4 dates in mid July and 2 on 6th Sept. The final report of the year in the county came from Whitburn observatory on the coast, with a bird seen moving south on 14th September.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

There were 21 records of passage birds 4th April to 18th September, back to normal after a poor year in 2019. All were singles apart from 2 at Pilsworth Fisheries 6th April. One lingered at Walkerwood Reservoir for up to a week at the end of June and was presumably a non-breeder, as was one over Wigan town centre 6th July. Eight return passage birds were noted, commencing 21st July.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

The first Osprey recorded back at Kielder was on 26th March, when the usual male from nest 1A landed with a fish. This was the start of the 2020 nesting season in Northumberland, and as ever it was a mixed nesting season with highs and lows!

Overall, it was a successful summer with all the nests found being in the Border Forest Kielder. Six pairs laid and at another nest a lone female remained unmated .

Clutch sizes were 4, 4, 3, 3 and 2. One nest's outcome is unknown but at least 2 eggs were laid. Brood sizes were 3, 2, 2 and one with another nest failing to hatch 2 eggs.

Most of the brood losses were because of poor weather in June, but a healthy 10 chicks did fledge.

At nest 6 the first egg was laid on 19th April but on 21st April a Raven removed the egg while the female had her back turned! She still went on to lay another 3 eggs with no more problems.

At nest 1A, when the 3 chicks were about 3 weeks old, a female Goshawk attacked the chicks which were crouched very low in the nest cup. She tried twice to pull the youngest of the 3

chicks out of the nest, the second time a large tuft of feathers was pulled out, but between the chick hanging on for dear life and the female Osprey mobbing it, the Goshawk failed to predate the chick.

The Goshawk had a colour ring on and had been ringed in the Border Forest 3 years before.

### **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.

**Covid impact score: 1**

The North York Moors still await their first signs of possible nesting by this species at one of the 2 northern reservoirs, Lockwood Beck and Scaling Dam. Birds have occasionally summered in the area in the past, but a nesting platform *in situ* at Scaling has failed to elicit any real interest from passage birds. This year spring sightings were few at Scaling with the only reports from there being one on 4th May and another, presumably the same bird, recorded on 6 dates between 24th July and 7th August. There were no reports from Lockwood. Elsewhere a bird was recorded at Goathland on 9th April during illegal White-tailed Eagle searches!

### **NERF regional summary**

Once again the population at Kielder in Northumberland continued to grow with 6 pairs fledging 10 chicks, and another nest was occupied by an unmated female.

Away from the Kielder area, Ospreys were recorded at many different water bodies throughout the county but none showed any signs of breeding.

There was excitement in Durham where a pair of Ospreys built a nest platform late in the season; time will tell if the pair return in 2021. Away from this pair, there were few sightings with birds recorded at Lunedale and Baldersdale on 4 dates between mid-July-6th September the last bird in the county was on the coast on the 14th September. On the edge of Bowland too, a young pair built a nest but did not lay eggs. Again, time will tell if this is a sign of future colonisation.

Covid lockdown affected the sightings from the North York Moors where few Ospreys were recorded because people were at home.

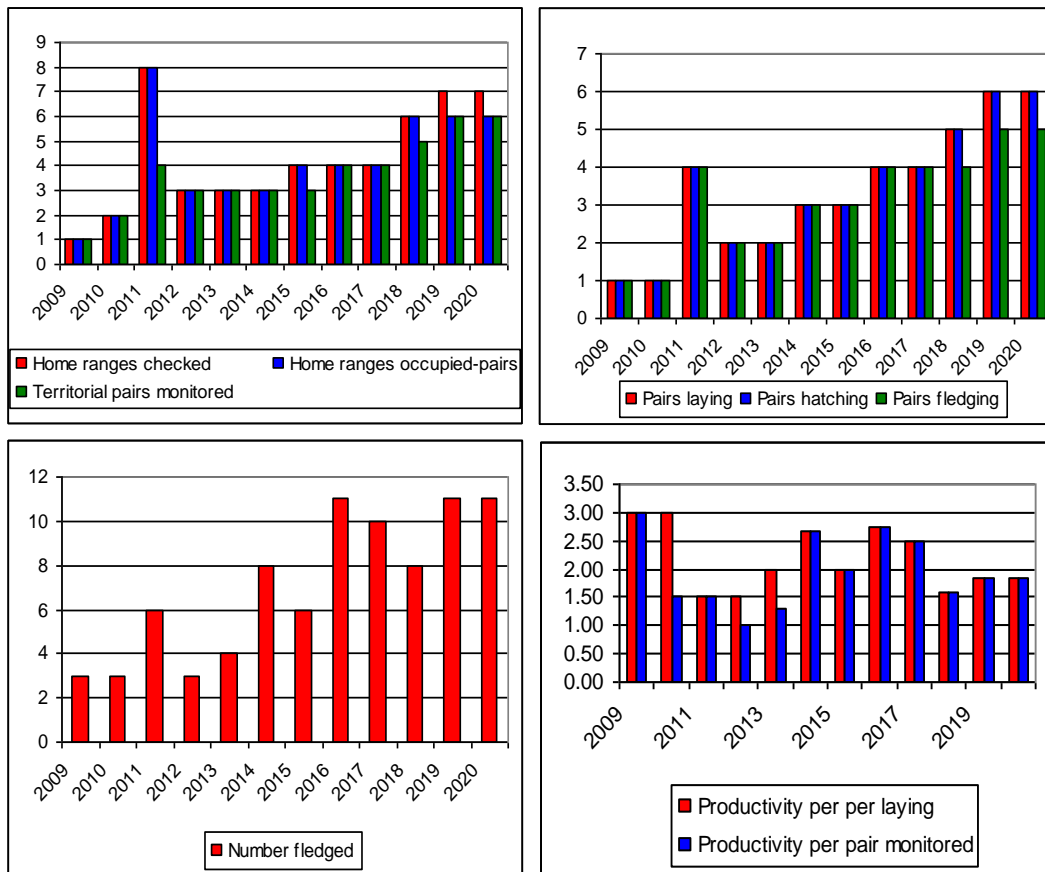
The opposite was true in Calderdale - because of Covid lockdown here, Osprey sightings improved by a huge 500% from 2 in 2019 to 10 in 2020 (11 birds). With members not able to monitor the uplands the two main river valleys got good coverage with 8 spring sightings April-May and 3 autumn sightings August-October.

In Cheshire, Greater Manchester and the Peak District, there was the usual run of passage birds in spring and autumn, but with no signs of colonisation.

The Osprey is Amber-listed because of a recent population decline 1981-2007. Climate change, which has resulted in an increase in torrential rain events in summer, may contribute to failure of chicks to survive to fledging in what is often an exposed nest platform. The Roy Dennis Foundation's work in translocating juveniles from Scotland to Poole Harbour in the hope of establishing a breeding population on the south coast, may perhaps be emulated at suitable sites in the NERF area, but it is by no means an easy option.



## Comparative data 2009-2020



## 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. 17-31 pairs were reported in 2019, with a 57% increase in the last 35 years (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704).

## 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. Direct persecution from gun or trap in Britain is of relatively rare incidence compared to that suffered by other large raptors. Honey-buzzards present no problem for gamekeepers as they feed principally on the larvae of bees and wasps excavated from their nests. Carrion-feeding by the species is virtually unheard of therefore poisoning presents no threat to birds. Extremely wet summers can have a catastrophic effect on breeding success if there is large scale wash-out of bee and wasp nests. UK birds migrate to Africa in relative safety from guns, overflying the Mediterranean via Gibraltar unlike birds from Eastern Europe that cross via the island of Malta running the gauntlet of illegal hunting there.

## 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
NYMUBSG	9	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00

## Group Reports

### Durham Upland Bird Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

As part of the 2020 national Honey-buzzard breeding survey DUBSG members made 19 visits to 11 locations during August and the first few days of September. No birds were observed. There were no reports anywhere in the county throughout the 2020 season and Honey-buzzards have been reported just once on spring passage and 5 times on autumn passage in the last decade.

## 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

A total of 6 individuals turned up this season of which 4 paired up. A pale male (4th year) paired with a female first seen in 2019. Food carrying was first observed on 14th July at one of the former sites. A nest holding 2 chicks just over 2 weeks old was located on 31st July; they were ringed on 3rd August. Both branched about 20th August and the last adult was seen 24th August. Bad weather then prevented further sightings.

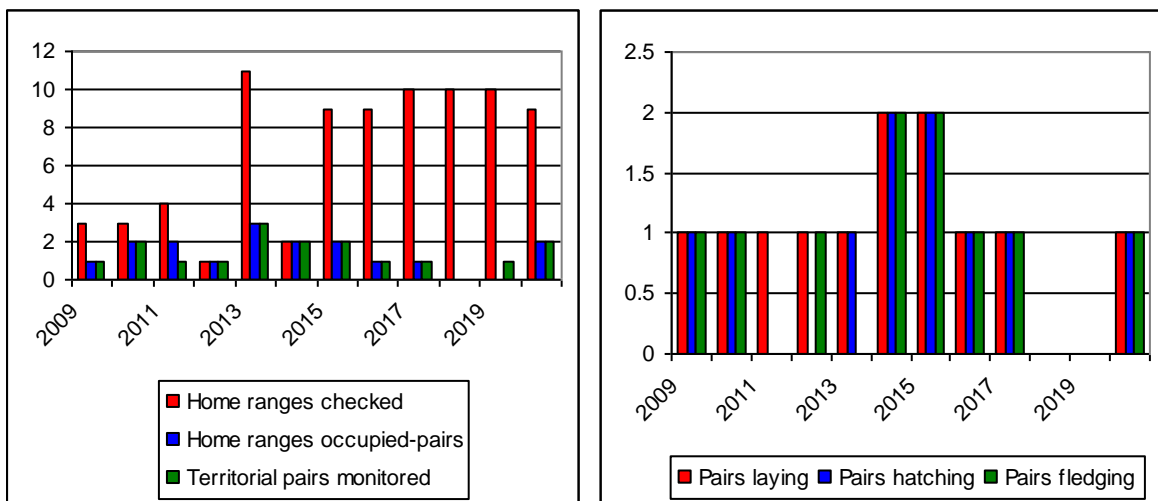
At another former site, a male, first seen some distance away on 21st May, was seen food-carrying on 20th July. A further 6 or so food carries were observed in the same general area during August but no nest could be found. The female was seen only once and the male last seen on 22nd August. Activity thereafter petered out. It was concluded, (a) that either this nest failed, (b) any young fledged earlier than those of the other nest or (c) the nest was just too well hidden to be located in the time-frame available. Away from the core nesting areas a presumed passage bird was observed near Glaisdale on 5th May.

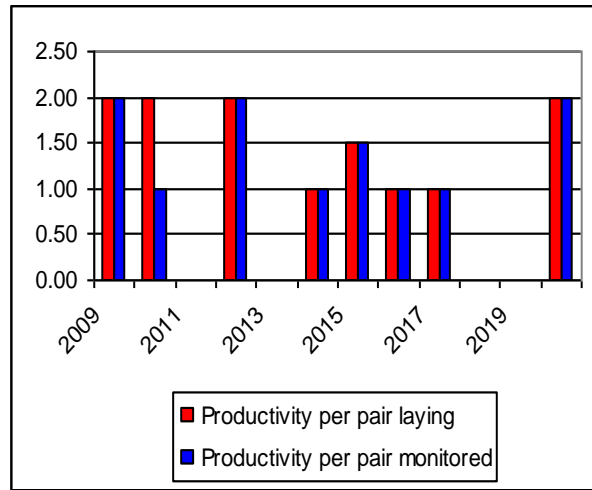
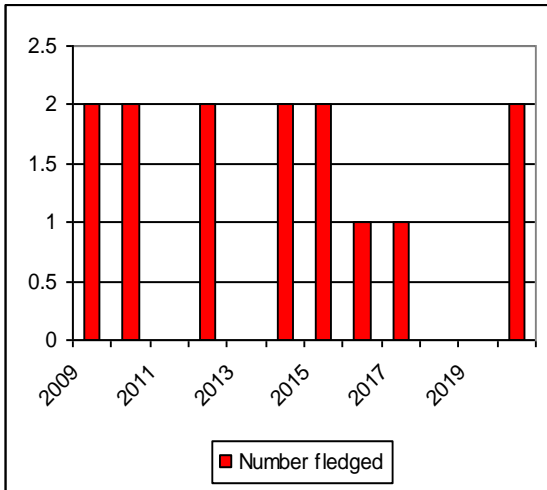
There were no reports of birds from any of the other Groups.

### NERF regional summary

Clearly this species continues to be either absent or extremely difficult to track down in NERF areas other than the North York Moors. It is a very time-consuming species in regard to fieldwork and it requires dedicated attention in order to produce tangible results. Unless there is dogged commitment to the species, any success achieved is basically going to be due to luck and chance observation.

### Comparative data 2009-2020





## Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*



Jonathan Coombes

### UK population estimate

In 2016 the population was estimated at 28500 pairs (Woodward I. *et al.* 2020, APEP 4 *British Birds* 113:69-104). The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey report for 2019 in England showed a 1% increase 2018-19, a 19% decrease 2008-18, and overall a 22% decrease in the period 1995-2018. Due to Covid-19, figures could not be updated for 2020.

### 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 may be having an impact on Sparrowhawk populations 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 beliefs there are calls in some quarters for the Sparrowhawk population to be controlled, despite there being very little scientific evidence to support these allegations.

### Conservation status

UK: **Green**

European: Not of concern

Global: Least concern

Listed as Near Threatened (Stanbury, Andrew *et al.* 2017. The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain, *British Birds* 110:502-517)

### 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
CRSG	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
C&WRSG	4	4	0	0	4	3	3	3	8	2.67	2.00
MRG*	31	15	NC	NC	10	10	10	10	20	2.00	2.00
NRG	57	43	1	5	37	37	33	27	68	1.84	1.84
PDRMG	21	12	NC	2	9	9	9	8	21	2.33	2.33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>1.98</b>	<b>1.95</b>

\*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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

There were 250 records submitted to the group during the early part of 2020. Prior to the Government imposed lockdown, designed to reduce the spread of the lethal Covid-19 virus, the group identified 6 pairs occupying breeding territories. Unfortunately, no further

monitoring took place and whilst it is possible, perhaps probable, that some of the pairs went on to breed and fledge young the group is unable to confirm that assumption.

### **Cheshire and Wirral Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of Coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

Sparrowhawks are widespread in the Cheshire and Wirral Raptor Study group area, but time constraints mean a very limited amount of monitoring takes place.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of Coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

As usual with this species there were many sightings (over 300 during the year) but few nests found and even fewer monitored. The number of young seen is a considerable under-estimate of the true total due to the difficulties of seeing into a high nest which is often in a non-climbable tree.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

The two study areas continued in 2020, with casual monitoring undertaken from two other areas of Northumberland.

Following a poor breeding season in 2019, the population recovered in the Border Forests in 2020, with an excellent 33 home ranges occupied. Twenty-eight pairs were monitored, with 47 young fledging from 20 successful nests. Goshawks affected fledging success at 2 sites. At one site, the entire brood of half-grown young were predated; and at the other site, a single young was predated on the verge of fledging (a male sibling survived). At 2 other nests, single chicks were predated by a fox having fallen out of the nest and on to the ground.

In Slaley Forest, 10 home ranges were checked, 5 of which were occupied. All nests found were in Sitka Spruce. Three nests were successful, fledging 13 young including a brood of 6. Some pairs continue to nest successfully in close proximity to buzzards in mature relatively open stands of woodland.

A further 7 home ranges were checked in the Cheviots while monitoring other raptor species; 5 home ranges were occupied, 4 pairs were monitored and 7 young fledged.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Work continued as usual in the long-term study area in South Yorkshire, where 12 nests were monitored. Three nests were abandoned pre-laying and one nest with small young failed.

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.

Monitoring of this relatively common species away from the long-term study area is limited due to other commitments.

## South Peak Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

No specific studies or monitoring are undertaken in the SPRSG area. Sightings are frequently recorded in both urban and rural areas. One breeding record of a Sparrowhawk nest was reported, where the young were predated at approximately 10 days old. Four soaring over Chesterfield suburbs during a “lockdown garden birdwatch” on 12th April was unusual.

## 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.

## Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles*



Mike Price

## UK population estimate

712 pairs were reported to RBBP in 2019, with a 206% increase over the last 25 years (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704).

The latest APEP figure is 620 pairs, based on RBBP data 2013-2017. (Woodward, I. *et al* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104).

## 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: 502-517).

### **National and regional threat assessment**

The Northern Goshawk is a notoriously elusive, generalist raptor that for decades now has suffered from persistent illegal interference and remain absent from large areas of prey-rich and suitable breeding habitat as undertones of this archaic mentality remain. Although Goshawks are fully protected by law, and hold a current UK Conservation status of Green, they remain vulnerable and continue to face many threats nationwide. Sadly, even in this day and age, illegal persecution by humans, particularly in rural areas, remains the primary threat to the health and population of the species. Forestry operations and recreation are also of growing concern in some areas, but NERF Groups continue to show that through engagement with forest operators, unintentional disturbance can be managed and limited. On the continent the Goshawk has shown it can successfully colonise prey rich urban areas. Although largely dependent on mature forest, annual data, compiled from across the NERF study groups, continues to demonstrate prey availability is unlikely to be a major constraint and that mere survival remains the species' main challenge. Population expansion, consistent with many of the raptor species studied by NERF, is restricted by persistent disturbance. Any 'stable populations' exist for the most part in the more inaccessible, 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 are naturally richer in prey and thus should be 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. Regrettably reports of illegal activity continue to grow. A collaborative approach from conservation friendly organisations is needed to both tackle and help mitigate ongoing disturbance and illegal persecution against the species which continues to restrict species productivity and range expansion.



## 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
BRSR	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
CaRSG	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
ChRG	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	1.00
DUBSG	3	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
NRG (N'land)	61	43	3	5	38	38	31	28	50	1.31	1.31
NRG (Cumbria)	5	5	0	0	5	5	3	3	7	1.40	1.40
PDRMG	13	5	0	2	3	3	3	3	7	2.33	2.33
SPRSG	15	15	0	0	15	14	13	13	25	1.79	1.67
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>1.48</b>	<b>1.46</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Single birds were seen in two separate areas, including a site where birds attempt to breed almost annually, but no evidence of breeding was found in 2020. There is plenty of suitable habitat 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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Goshawks are an enigma in Calderdale. Year after year birds are observed in spring and year after year these sightings come to nothing. The study area has both large swathes of suitable habitat and abundant prey and yet we have never recorded a successful breeding attempt; 2020 followed the same pattern.

Birds were recorded on 9 separate occasions between 21st February and 27th April and a pair was seen displaying over the same section of woodland on 23rd, 24th and 25th April. Unfortunately, despite an extensive search a nest was not located.

Whilst the group is unable to explain why birds continually arrive in spring and pairs regularly display before failing to breed, having regard to the extensive suitable habitat, we believe that Goshawk qualifies as a 'black hole species' in Calderdale.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole county.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Sightings are noted only from the east of the county. A single pair was known to breed raising a single chick.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The main study area remained open to extensive surveying throughout the spring and summer. Despite considerable effort at this site only one breeding pair was detected. The pair went on to successfully fledge at least 2, and possibly 3 young. Covid restrictions otherwise inhibited access to some other traditional home ranges at the crucial time of display in early spring.

Elsewhere in the eastern lowlands a bird, or birds, were reported from one site on several dates in early March and at another site on two dates in mid-May. Notwithstanding its elusive nature, the species remains genuinely scarce. Goshawk is considered as a 'black hole species' in Durham.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** Northumberland 2; Cumbria 1

*Northumberland:* Despite Covid restrictions most of the Goshawk home ranges were visited in Northumberland, but with the first visit being later than usual, some home ranges might have failed early before then, so a little caution is needed when comparing totals to previous seasons. However, even allowing for Covid-19, 2020 was an excellent year with only one less occupied home range found than in 2019. With the excellent spring weather and no “nastie” weather at the key hatching time, the Goshawk did well, fledging 50 chicks (only 35 chicks in 2019) from 28 nests.

In the Kielder Forest population one nest failed due to the chicks being taken by another Goshawk. At another the nest failed when the adult male was predated by a fox. Inadvertent human disturbance is not usually a reason for Goshawks to fail in the Border Forest Kielder. But at one nest site this year, things were different. With the first lockdown from March onwards, the forest was very quiet, with no people around, and a pair of birds moved from their normal nesting territory, choosing to nest right on a footpath. All went well with the female incubating a clutch of eggs from mid-April, then just as the eggs were due to hatch, lockdown finished, and even though the path was closed, the numbers of people out and about increased, many using the path! Unfortunately, it was just too much for the birds and they deserted the nest.

In another part of county, the problems of getting into the nest sites late were highlighted with the observer stating that even with extensive searching, and plenty of signs, they were unable to say whether there ever had been a nest or just a single bird.

The NRG would like to thank Forestry England for timing forestry operations outside the nesting seasons.

*NRG Eastern Cumbria:* Along with Northumberland Cumbria enjoyed a successful season where 3 nests fledged 7 chicks, and at another nest site the 1st year female failed before any eggs were laid.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

The fieldworkers who monitor this species do not wish to have the population figures published. There is accumulating evidence to support the belief that significantly increased felling of mature timber across the major forests over the last few years is causing the Goshawk population problems with pairs vying with each other and Buzzard pairs for occupation of contracting nesting habitat. Displaying birds are being reported now from widely separate locations in the National Park where mature woodland is present. One can only speculate as to whether this represents a natural or forced expansion away from congested core areas.

As mentioned under the NYM Buzzard account, in May on Wheeldale Moor, an adult Goshawk was filmed confined in a crow trap surrounded by dead Jackdaws as a man approached, entered the trap, and brutally despatched the bird. This was on Duchy of Lancaster land (owned by the Queen) so not surprisingly this incident soon became high profile resulting in quite incriminating media coverage. Articles appeared in *The Times* and other papers, and the incident also featured on Channel 4 News with this station subsequently producing a 30-minute programme covering an autumn grouse-shoot day on the estate where the persecution incident occurred; this very much to the discomfiture of those involved with the shoot. Following a very intense police investigation, one of the gamekeepers on the estate resigned his post. It is understood that a prosecution is pending but has been delayed due to the pandemic.

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

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

The Goshawk population in the PDRMG study area is showing some improvement over the last 2 years. One successful nest is in an area where Goshawk have not bred successfully for 26 years. Monitoring was normal with no significant impact from Covid.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

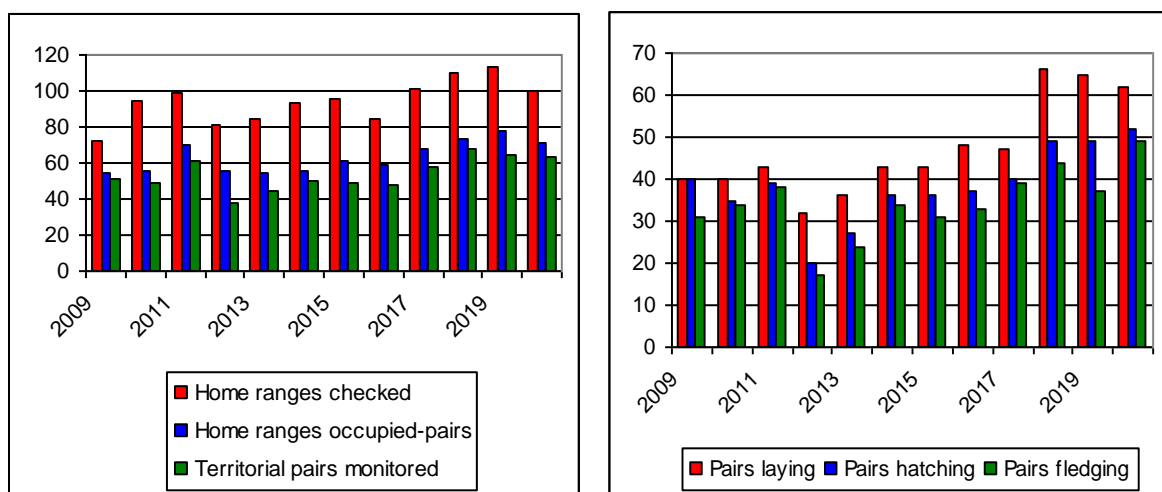
Four pairs fledged a minimum of 7 young in a gritstone part of the Peak District, while a further 4 nests on a nearby estate are reliably reported to have fledged approximately 12 young. Of 3 further regular monitored pairs, one failed for unknown reasons, probably at the egg stage, one fledged 2 young and at one site the nest was never located but adults were repeatedly heard calling and one fledged juvenile was located late in the season. In South

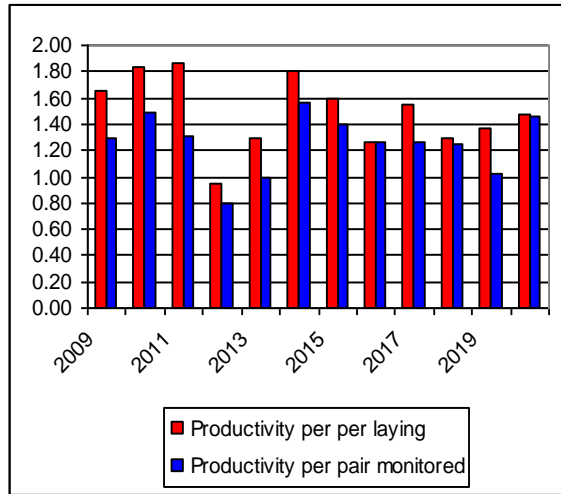
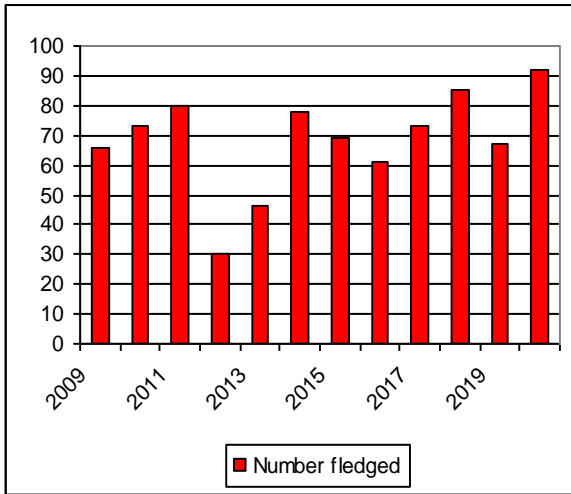
Derbyshire 3 of 4 reported nests were successful, but the number of fledged young is not known (min. 1 per nest recorded in table). Due to Covid restrictions only one brood of 4 young was ringed.

### NERF regional summary

Recurrently, only Northumberland 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. Across the NERF study areas, the number of young fledged per territorial pair monitored increased from as low as 1.03 in 2019 to 1.48. The increase was reflected in Northumberland as the number of young fledged per nest increased to 1.31 (0.89 in 2019). The story was similar in eastern Cumbria where 3 pairs were known to fledge 7 young (only 4 young in 2019). The Peak District study area shows some improvement in productivity over the last 2 years and there was one successful nest where Goshawk have not bred successfully for 26 years. Monitoring was normal here, but in the South Peaks Covid impacted monitoring and ringing but again the number of young fledged per nest increased to 1.67 (1.27 in 2019). The North York Moors highlighted the ongoing struggles for the species with both habitat loss and high-profile persecution with one incident hitting national TV and written press; unquestionably this was uncomfortable coverage for the estate in question. The incident led to Police investigations and the resignation of a gamekeeper. Further to this, Goshawks remain an enigma in Calderdale, birds continually arrive and display in spring but fail to breed. Suitable habitat is extensive, and the group believe that Goshawk qualifies as a 'black hole species'. Only a single pair was known to breed in both Cheshire and Durham. Durham also reported the odd bird displaying but the species remains genuinely scarce; Covid did impact some monitoring but the Goshawk is considered as a 'black hole species' there. Across the NERF Study Groups, despite some encouraging productivity increases the number of young fledging remains well below 2 per nest and, as highlighted above, the Goshawk continues to face a variety of threats, intentional disturbance and illegal persecution remain of prime concern to the breeding status and future prosperity of the species.

### Comparative data 2009-2020





## Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*



Phil Littler

### UK population estimate

401 pairs were reported to RBBP in 2019 with a 25 year trend of 389% (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704). Some “pairs” referred to 2 or more females paired with a single polygynous male, so the number of breeding females was estimated as 321-406. 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, I. *et al.*2020. APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104).

### 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 they are likely to face an increase threat of persecution if they attempt to breed on heather moorland, which are 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	3	3	NC	NC	3	3	3	3	3*	1.00	1.00
NRG	3	3	NC	NC	3	3	2	2	7	2.33	2.33
<b>Totals</b>	6	6	NC	NC	6	6	5	5	10	1.67	1.67

*\*indicates that the actual number fledging is not known and has, therefore been recorded as a minimum of 1 per nest.*

No other Group reported Marsh Harriers attempting to breed in their respective study areas during 2020.

### 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

A few are seen each spring and summer. Most birds are passing through, but the odd one lingers for a few days. There have been no records of two birds being seen together.

#### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score: 3**

Marsh Harriers are only seen on passage within the study area. There were 17 sightings in the upland areas between 11th April and 31st August. A 1st summer male roosted in the traditional Hen Harrier roost on 27th May.

**Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score: 2**

In common with previous years Marsh Harriers were recorded on passage throughout 2020 and the number of birds being recorded during spring continues to increase annually. In excess of 900 sightings were recorded, primarily from the Dee and Mersey estuaries. A peak count of 20 individuals was recorded at the Neston reed bed.

There were reports of 3 pairs successfully fledging, however no further information is available. Consequently the group has assumed that a minimum of one chick fledged per nest and this is reflected in the table.

**Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score: 2**

Recent years have seen evidence in April of a light passage of Marsh Harriers across both lowland and upland areas, so with Covid travel restrictions in place at this critical time a degree of under-recording was inevitable, especially in remoter upland terrain. A small peak in sightings in the lowlands was noted with single birds on 4 dates between 8th and 29th April.

There was just one summer report in late May of a bird in the SW uplands but interestingly 1-2 birds were found to be roosting on heather moorland in the same general area in September through to October. This significant observation is the first known example of autumn roosting in an upland habitat.

Meanwhile Teesmouth and Durham BC members report 1-3 birds on the north Tees marshes throughout the year though unlike 2019 there was no confirmation of breeding.

**Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score: 1**

Of the 29 records received, 19 were from the mosslands and 13 of these were in August or September, with just 3 between 20th April and 9th May, one sighting on 23rd April being of 2 birds. There was no suspicion of breeding, but sightings of all ages of birds are increasing both here and at Woolston Eyes SSSI in nearby Cheshire.

Vismig records from the Winter Hill area accounted for 3 more in August or September.

**Northumbria Ringing Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score: 1**

After many years of having only one known nesting area for Marsh Harriers in Northumberland, 2020 turned to be a very exciting year. During the breeding season 3 nesting pairs were located over a wide area in the county.

The traditional breeding territory was occupied an adult pair which laid 4 eggs and then went on to fledge 4 chicks.

The second pair nested in a very small reed bed in the north of the county where it was found in early May and monitored by local ornithologists. Everything was going well with the pair - food passing etc - until well into June. Unfortunately, by the end of June no adults were being seen and it looked as though the nest had failed. The nest was visited in early July and found to contain at least 3 eggs which had been predated. It is believed that the eggs were deserted then later predated by a corvid.

The third nest was even more unusual. A local birdwatcher got in contact with an English Nature fieldworker to explain that he was seeing Marsh Harriers exhibiting breeding behaviour. What made this site different was its location it was not in a reed bed, but in a large patch of juncus on a sloping hillside on a grouse moor in SW Northumberland!

The nest was visited in late June and found to contain 3 eggs. The chicks, 2 males and a female, were ringed on 3 August in the presence of both the estate's head keeper and under keeper. All 3 had fledged by 14 August and were seen regularly on the moor until early September.

It is believed that this is the first Marsh Harrier to nest to be found in juncus in the country even though Hen Harriers have been using this habitat for a few years now.

### **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.

**Covid impact score: 3**

Nothing has occurred over 2020 to indicate any improvement in the fortunes of this species in the NYMs. Admittedly, coverage of moorland estates was significantly unavoidably down. Sightings recorded of individuals were few and all "cream-crown" birds and as usual not even any half-hearted display activity was witnessed anywhere. Those records received were of a bird at Glaisdale High Moor on 5th May; one at Farndale, 19th May; one at Chop Gate on 3rd August and it or another at Tripsdale on 11th August.

A few observations involved Scaling Dam, with a bird there on 7th April, and up to 2 over 3 days in early August. The Tees estuary, however, presented a very different picture for this species. The Teesmouth Bird Club received 130 records from members covering, despite the restrictions imposed by lockdown, every month of the year. Up to 6 birds were regularly recorded at a roost on the North Tees Marshes from mid-January to early February and some low-key display by birds of both sexes was recorded in late spring. Clearly there will have been multiple records of the same individuals reported but nonetheless, with this volume of birds within such a short distance of the NYMs why on earth do we not have Marsh Harriers breeding here on the more than ample suitable nesting habitat available. There can only be one reason – they are being deliberately prevented from doing so. It does not take intensive effort of speculation to conclude who those responsible for this situation might be!

### **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.

**Covid impact score: 1**

Not known to occur as a breeding species, however they are becoming more common on passage each year.

### **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.

**Corvid impact score: 1**

Not known to occur in the area as a breeding species. Seven sightings reported in the SPRSG area between 21st March and 7th September. Adult females were seen on 21st March and 22nd April, and juveniles between 24th August and 7th September.

### NERF regional summary

The breeding pattern across the NERF Study Area during 2020 mirrored that of 2019. Once again only the Northumbria Ringing Group and the Cheshire Raptor Study Group reported breeding attempts. Three pairs fledged young in Cheshire; however the number fledging from each nest is not known. For the purpose of this report it has been estimated that a minimum of one chick fledged from each nest.

In Northumberland the RSG located 3 nests fledging a total of 7 chicks after one nest failed at egg stage when the adults deserted the nest.

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, North Yorkshire 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.

When 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.

### Wing Tagging Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*, in Norfolk

Between 1990 and 2010 North West Norfolk Ringing Group had metal-ringed 213 Marsh Harrier nestlings. Only 7 were ever recovered, all were found dead.

According to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) between 1909 – 2012 a total of 2569 Marsh Harriers were ringed with metal rings, few were ever reported and most of these were recoveries of dead birds.

The wing tagging project began in 2011 and by the end of 2020 a total of 651 nestling Marsh Harriers had been ringed and wing tagged, 98 of these in 2020. This has resulted in a recovery/sighting rate of 37.75%, a result that could not have been anticipated.

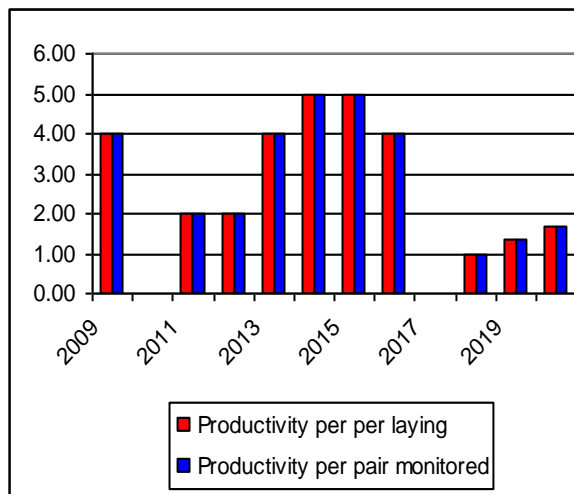
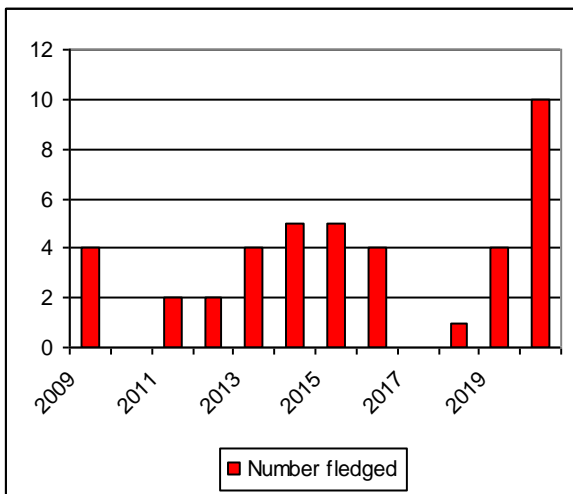
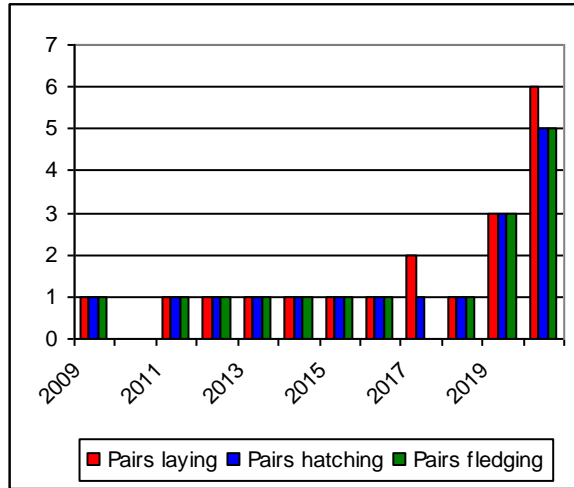
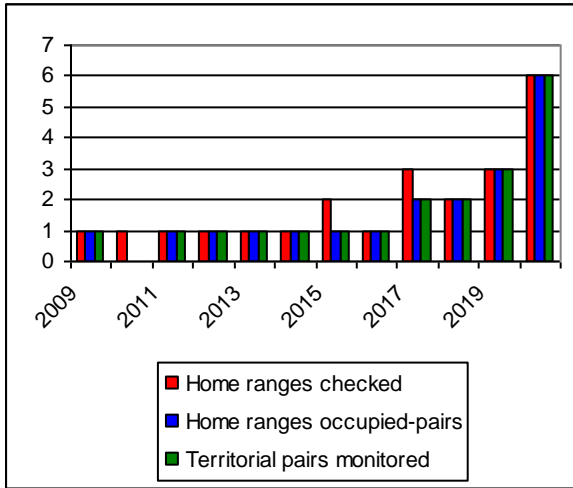
Individuals that have been marked in this project have been reported and photographed all over the UK. Many have involved multiple sightings of the same bird providing a fascinating snapshot of their ‘life’ history so far. Many of these birds that have been tagged in this project have been seen abroad in Belgium, Portugal, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and Norway and the first confirmed sighting of a British ringed Marsh Harrier in Senegal and another in the Canary Isles.

Conventional metal ringing alone would never have produced such extraordinary results. Phil would welcome sightings of any birds seen in the NERF region. Sightings should be forwarded to Phil at [harriermanphil@gmail.com](mailto:harriermanphil@gmail.com) or by mobile on 07748 556758. Please include the tag number, letter and number, time and date, location, including the grid reference if possible, age and sex in the report.

For further information visit:

[http://www.nwnrg.co.uk/research/marsh\\_harrier/Marsh%20Harrier%20homepage.htm](http://www.nwnrg.co.uk/research/marsh_harrier/Marsh%20Harrier%20homepage.htm)

### Comparative data 2009-2020



## Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*



Pete Morris

### UK population estimate

The last national survey in 2016 provided a 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 with 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 breeding population in northern England has increased slightly in the intervening years.

RBBP estimated 209-331 breeding pairs in 2019 (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704) with a 12 year trend showing a weak decrease of -29%.

### 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

The report analysing Natural England's data from satellite tracked birds (2019 Murgatroyd, M. *et al.* 2019. 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 overdriven grouse moor estates was 10 times that of non- grouse moors. 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. Illegal persecution continues to have a major impact on the

conservation status of the species. At least a further 6 tagged birds disappeared in suspicious circumstances during 2020 giving a total of 46 since 2018 (*Legal Eagle* 91). The Hen Harrier 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
BRSG	20+	8	4+	0	8	8	6	5	11	1.4	1.4
CaRSG	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
DUBSG	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
MRG	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
NRG	16	6	0	0	6	6	6	6	20	3.3	3.3
NYMUBSG	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
PDRMG	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
SPRSG	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.2</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

The number of breeding pairs of Hen Harriers on the United Utilities Bowland Estate continued its recovery in 2020, with 7 nests, compared to 5 in 2019 and 3 in 2018. Also, for the first time that we know of since 2010, a pair of Hen Harriers nested on a private estate in Bowland. The male of this pair was born on the United Utilities estate in 2019. Over 80% of Hen Harrier nests in Bowland since 1990 that we have known about have been on the United Utilities estate (the United Utilities estate makes up around a third of the Bowland Fells SSSI and SPA), so this nest was a welcome development.

Breeding success on the United Utilities estate in 2020 was much lower than in 2019. Three nests failed, the first failures since 2015. One nest was predated by a fox, with the oldest chicks only a few days from fledging, and 2 other nests failed at the egg stage for unknown reasons. Productivity per successful nest in 2020 was also much lower than in 2019 and 2018,

with only 11 juveniles fledging from the 5 successful nests (compared to 22 from 5 nests in 2019 and 13 from 3 nests in 2018). Five to 8 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 further.

Five of the juveniles that fledged in 2019 returned to nest in 2020 including 3 of the birds that were fitted with satellite tags in 2019. Four nested in Bowland and one elsewhere in northern England. One satellite-tagged male, named Apollo, spent the winter of 2019/20 in Extremadura, Spain, returned to breed in Bowland, and then returned to the exact same location in Spain for the 2020/21 winter.

Numbers at the roosts in Bowland in the winter of 2020/21 were similar to the last few years. The satellite-tagged birds that stayed in Bowland over winter revealed hunting areas and roost sites that we were not previously aware of.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Following the 2 unexplained failed breeding attempts on the heather moors in the west of the study area in 2019 the group had high expectations for 2020. However; despite receiving 132 individual reports during the year the 2020 breeding attempts were not repeated.

As in previous years, Hen Harriers returned to the same traditional winter roost site in autumn 2019 where they were observed regularly through to the New Year. From January to the end of March up to 3 individuals were regularly observed on the winter roost. Throughout the year 84 records were received by the group. Several of the reported sightings were from areas where Hen Harriers have not been recorded previously during the summer months. However, because of the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic none of the sightings could be confirmed.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

All records received were outside of the breeding season, mainly on the Dee and Mersey estuaries.

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

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

There were no reports of breeding and none of pairs establishing territory. Small numbers were present, as ever, in the Durham Pennines during the winter, early spring and autumn periods. The group operated a series of coordinated watches at possible roost sites over designated dates in February, October and December. In total, 30 visits were made to 13 different locations and 74 hours of observation were logged. Just 2 ringtails were seen in February, one in October and one & 2 in December. In addition, 2 roost areas attracted 1-3 birds intermittently over the winter and autumn months. We also know from information on the movements of several satellite-tagged birds that they too moved through the area, often using previously unknown roost sites for a few days.

Durham Bird Club members submitted just 9 reports of sightings of single ringtails on the western moors, all were outside of the breeding season. Along the eastern coastal belt two reports of singles in April and of singles in September and early October suggested light passage.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

An immature male wintered until early May on the West Pennine Moors, where 1-2 ringtails were present in what is potential breeding habitat in early June. A ringtail was present here from 12th July to 6th August. A male was seen 7th February on the Horwich Moors.

On the mosslands, an elusive ringtail, present from the autumn of 2019, remained until 22nd March, with it or another also being seen 14th May. The sole autumn record on the mosslands was of a ringtail on 1st September and surprisingly there were no further records through to the year end. Records from the visible migration site on the Winter Hill massif began with a juvenile 20th September, followed by a male 27th September, joined by a female 28th September - far fewer than usual. The last report was of a male flying along the Irwell valley at Linnyslaw Moss, 20th October.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

With favourable dry weather in the spring of 2020 the Northumbrian Hen Harrier had a very successfully breeding season aided by a notable peak in the Field Vole population and a high cone crop on the Sitka spruce, which meant a high finch *spp* populations. Prey was plentiful! Once again 6 pairs were found in the same area as 2019 but the big difference was fledging success. Only 9 chicks reached fledging in 2019 but this year a great total of 20 chicks fledged, with every nest managing to produce fledged young (no nest failed completely). Clutch sizes were good with 3 of 6, 2 of 5 and one of 3, 31 eggs in total; all the eggs hatched. One chick was found predated by a fox after it fledged. No satellite tags were fitted by the RSPB but Natural England continued with their tagging project. Thanks go to the Northumberland Hen Harrier Protection Partnership.

Very few birds were recorded away from the main population centre and most of those were later in the summer, Northumberland has huge areas of suitable nesting habitat for Hen Harriers so we look forward to the day when we see natural expansion into these areas.

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

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

**Level of monitoring:** Occasional breeding species, nests monitored when found.

**Covid impact score:** 2

Over a normal season probably a good 70-75% of suitable Hen Harrier nesting habitat will be checked. Not surprisingly this figure was nowhere near achieved in 2020 due to Covid restrictions. The last known nest areas were covered, but as usual in vain. The only known roost site of recent years was checked in late February with negative outcome. The head-keeper confirmed it hadn't been used all winter, (which, of course, may or may not have been true)! A male bird was, however, reported to the Teesmouth Bird Club as probably roosting on Liverton Moor on the northern fringe of the NYMs on 20th March. A hunting ringtail was reported in the same general area over the first half of February and it or another was there on

9th March. From reports received it did appear that there were rather more birds wandering about than usual, especially in the final months of the year, in the Hartoft/Rosedale area. Always lone wanderers though. So, still a depressing picture presented by this species in the NYMs.

### Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one long term monitoring study area. No Hen Harrier breeding attempts were recorded in the study area in 2020.

### South Peak Raptor Study Group

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

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; several long term study areas are surveyed.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Despite the lockdown, some coverage of local moorlands in the eastern Peak District was still possible, but with a much reduced number of visits. There was no evidence of any breeding attempts occurring in the study area this year, including the Upper Derwent Valley.

### NERF regional summary

2019 had been the most productive breeding season in England since at least 2006 with 47 chicks fledging from 15 successful nesting attempts. It is therefore encouraging to report a further modest increase for 2020 when 60 young fledged from 19 successful nests in Bowland, Northumberland, the Yorkshire Dales and Cumbria. Another 5 nests failed to fledge any young. The table above covering the NERF recording areas highlights the importance of the longstanding partnerships in the Northumberland NP and the United Utilities Estate in Bowland in effectively protecting key populations. These two centres between them contributed 11 of the successful nests from which 31 young fledged.

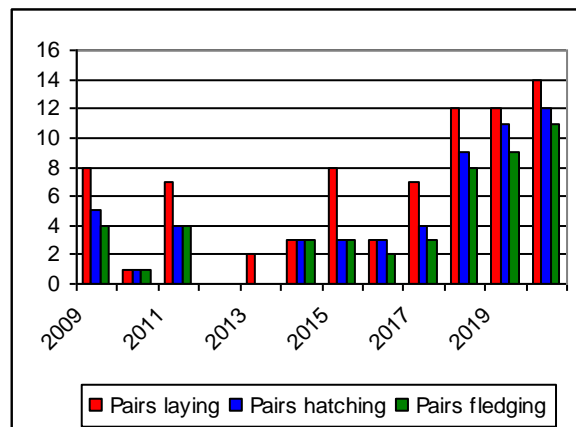
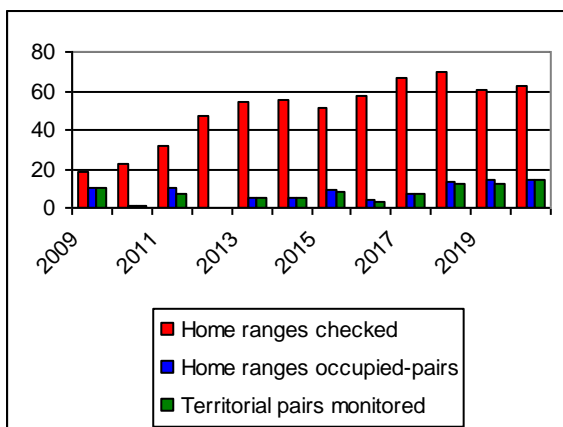
These sites are notably away from driven grouse moors.

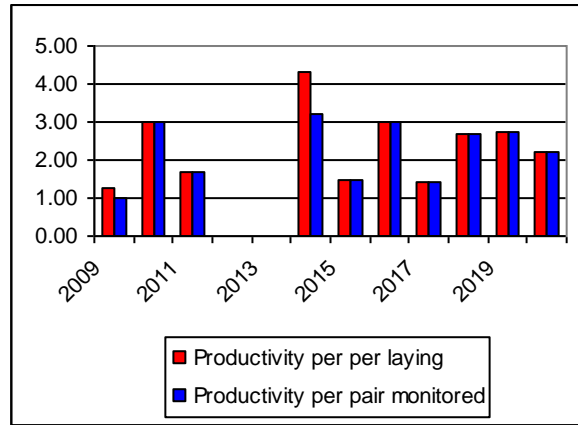
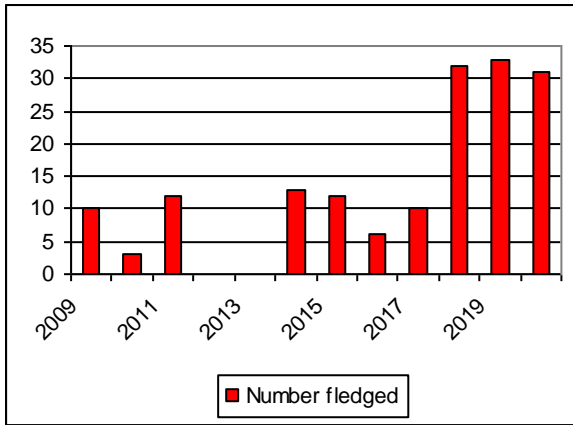
Elsewhere the remaining nests were largely monitored and managed by Natural England and landowners with some of the nests included in the 2nd year of the trial Brood Management scheme.

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.

Covid restrictions had little impact on the ability to monitor breeding sites and their outcomes.

### Comparative data 2009-2020





## White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*



Stephen Daly

### UK population estimate

The White-tailed Eagle population was estimated to be 113 pairs in 2015, 113 pairs in 2017 and 130 pairs in 2020. The latest RBBP report gives a total of 116 breeding pairs in 2019 (99-123 pairs) with a strong increase of 1216% over the last 35 years (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704).

It does not yet breed within the NERF study area.

### Conservation status

UK: **Red**

Global: Least concern

### National threat assessment

Whilst the UK population is increasing, thanks to Scottish re-introduction programmes in 1975, 1990 and 2007, the population remains low and breeding still confined to Scotland. A proposed re-introduction programme for Suffolk was abandoned by Natural England in 2010. An Isle of Wight re-introduction scheme headed by Roy Dennis ([White-tailed Eagle Reintroduction on the Isle of Wight - Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation](#)) was licensed in 2019, and 6 birds were translocated from Western Scotland in June of that year and released into



the wild in August 2019. A further 7 birds were translocated in 2020. Two of the 2019 IoW birds spent time exploring within the NERF recording area in 2020.

With only 120 pairs any losses continue to have significant impact on the expansion of the species. The species is carrion-eating and therefore susceptible to accidental and deliberate poisoning. Egg collectors, farmers and gamekeepers continue to target the species and it is known that the species is vulnerable in the proximity of wind farms. Satellite-tagging of the species is helping to provide data as to the birds ranging habits and demise.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

Soon after the start of the first national full lockdown period, 23rd March, 2 satellite-tagged juvenile White-tailed Eagles of the Isle of Wight re-introduction stock decided to visit the NYMs. These birds created an enormous amount of interest among the general public over the lengthy 5 month period of their stay in the National Park and remarkably, both eventually departed fit and well. A detailed account of the eagles' travels from the IoW to the NYM appears in the article by Dr Tim Mackrill and Wilf Norman elsewhere in this Review.

### **Red Kite *Milvus milvus***



*Paul Danielson*

### **UK and Ireland breeding population estimates**

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). 8500+ breeding pairs is, therefore, very much an estimate of the overall UK and Ireland breeding population. 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.

## Conservation status

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

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

Global/European and EU regional assessments: **Red list** (Version 2020-3, Table 7).

The 2019 Review referred to birds from northern Europe populations increasingly overwintering on their breeding grounds. They were generally increasing and it was considered 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 population status. This prophecy has now become reality, it having been downgraded from 'Near Threatened' to 'Least Concerned'. Although it had apparently been undergoing a moderately rapid population decline due to poisoning from pesticides, persecution and changes in land-use amongst other threats, these declines had been more than compensated by increases in the majority of countries within its range such that the losses over the past three generations had been overcome. Notwithstanding this, poisoning (both deliberate and accidental) remained the greatest threat to continued population growth and threatened the presence of the species regionally, especially in southern Iberia. It had recently been lost as a breeding species in Morocco. (Source: *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*).

## National and regional threat assessment

Although the IUCN criteria for the safe reintroduction of Red Kites were considered to be met (i.e. that the threats which caused their demise some 150 years earlier were no longer an issue) some areas - notably Yorkshire and North Scotland - have experienced significant losses due to shooting and poisoning. Yorkshire figures of known casualties from the respective causes since releases began in 1999 are shown in brackets in the text below. No doubt the true figures are considerably higher).

Illegal primary 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 – a practice which has been illegal for more than 100 years, (Yorkshire-32 cases).

Kites are also susceptible to secondary 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 and accessibility 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. Residues accumulate in the victims resulting in eventual death, (Yorkshire-17cases). 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 large numbers of rats. Similarly, rats may congregate in and around farm buildings and controlling them through the use of rodenticide poses an obvious risk to kites and other scavenging species.

In 2020, a North Yorkshire suspected rodenticide victim was successfully treated with Vitamin K and made an apparently full recovery. Unfortunately, it then became a RTA victim, having been killed on the A61 at Harewood.

No doubt a slowly moving kite presents a very tempting target to anyone with a gun who is not concerned about their legal protection status, (Yorkshire-15 cases). The figure shown

relates to known victims and does not include those birds which had suffered non-fatal injuries, having been found to be carrying lead shot from old wounds when their remains were examined following subsequent mishaps. In two instances the victims were apparently shot whilst sitting on their nests

## 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	55	42	NC	NC	24	24	21	19	42	1.75	1.75
SPRSG	7	7	NC	0	7	5	5	5	10	2	1.43
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>1.79</b>	<b>1.68</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

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 gamebird 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

In common with previous years Red Kite failed to breed during 2020 despite the availability of large areas of suitable habitat.

There were 45 records of single birds from across the study area, a slight increase of 3 over 2019, and the group remains optimistic that birds will breed in the study area in the near future.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

Lots of sightings across the county, birds coming from Wales and Shropshire, a small number of pairs noted together.

### **Friends of Red Kites, NE England**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

**Coverage:** a significant number of sites were not covered for territory occupation after Covid-19 restrictions were applied on March 24th. All reports from Durham Upland Bird Study Group and Northumbria Ringing Group are now presented under the FoRK report as set out below.

Red Kite is a 'Black Hole' species with 15 confirmed cases of persecution between 2004 and 2018 (10 poisonings and 5 shootings). A number of these incidents came from areas either on or close to moorland managed for grouse. The very slow rate of population growth and range expansion in the north-east population compared with other release populations is a cause for concern and can at least be partly attributed to persecution. In 2019 two nestlings were fitted with satellite trackers in order to better understand the movements of the population. Within the first year there was a sudden, unexplained disappearance of both satellite-tagged birds. However, the data from the birds provided a significant insight into their movements. The birds travelled widely visiting the south of Scotland, Lancashire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire but always returned to their natal area. One bird was present on 26% of days a satellite signal was received, in the grouse moor areas of the North Pennines favouring the moorlands at the top of the Derwent valley, whilst the second bird was present on over 50% of days in the same area. Both birds disappeared over the same area of moorland to the south of the Derwent Reservoir. As both tagged birds spent a significant amount of time in the North Pennines it is a reasonable assumption that other young birds also regularly visit these areas. This is supported by frequent casual sightings in the same areas. Further analysis of the data and comparisons with other UK Red Kite populations is being undertaken to explain the reasons for the poor population growth in the north east.

**Breeding:** The number of occupied territories recorded, 42, was down from previous years. This was mainly due to the cessation of monitoring on March 24th, when the Government placed the country in a national lockdown. When lockdown was eased in May, the focus was on finding and monitoring nests of known territorial pairs. The number of young fledged per incubating females at 1.75 was higher than last year's figure of 1.43. A very dry and warm spring would have undoubtedly contributed to this. A minimum of 42 chicks fledged from 19 known successful nests. This is the highest number of fledged youngsters since 2014. Five nests failed, with disturbance from the extra footfall in woodland when the restrictions were eased possibly being a factor in these failures. In June 23 youngsters were ringed with 16 of these being suitable to wing-tag. White was the 2020 colour used for the tag on the right wing.

#### ***Breakdown of breeding pairs by county***

**Northumberland:** A total number of 3 successful breeding pairs fledging 8 young. This is a decrease in one pair from 2019 but south west Northumberland was an area that was affected by our Covid restricted monitoring programme.

**County Durham and Gateshead MBC** (collectively the historic vice-county of Durham): Sixteen pairs successfully fledged 34 chicks.

**Roosting Red Kites:** The National Roost Count carried out on 12th January 2020 produced a **minimum of 85 Red Kites** roosting in **4 locations** in our area. This is a record for the north east of England. Roost counts in the autumn and early winter built up from a count of 12 in late September to 67 in mid-December, counted at two roost locations.

In 2019 we reported that Red Kite sightings outside the breeding areas were on the increase. This trend has continued in 2020, and, with the number of fledged young also reaching a record high and, the number of roosting Red Kites increasing every winter, FoRK are a little more optimistic about the future of Red Kites in the north-east of England. This optimism is tempered with the continued persecution of birds in upland areas.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

35 records of birds, mostly singles, were received this year and was almost certainly an under-estimate of the total number seen (21 in 2019), and 24 of these were in the breeding season. There were rumours of a pair settling in a private estate with parkland on the west side of Wigan but this could not be substantiated. In the east, there were 7 sightings in the Saddleworth Moor/Dovestones/Swineshaw areas, with 2 birds seen in August. There seems to be an indication at last that birds are prospecting in the county.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

Considering the difficulties imposed on fieldwork, there were numerous sightings of this species across the NYMs. None in any way intimated the possibility of a potential breeding pair; most as usual appeared to involve wandering lone individuals. However, there were numerous, regular intriguing sightings of a bird in one particular area to the west of the moors over the early February to late May period. It was never seen to be carrying nesting material or prey but nonetheless the area concerned appears eminently suited to the nesting requirements of this species. As the most encouraging scenario so far observed as to the possible whereabouts of a breeding pair, this area will receive as much coverage as can be managed in 2021.

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

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Whilst not known to occur as a breeding species within the study area, increasing regular sightings suggest that they are breeding close to the 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

**Covid impact score:** 2

In South Derbyshire 4 sites were occupied by breeding pairs (3 nest trees identified as Oak, Larch and Beech). All nests were successful, with 8 young fledged in total, including the first brood of 3 for the area. In addition, 2 other "pairs" or associating birds (probably immatures) remained in their chosen areas for the season but no nests or offspring were found. A further

pair of kites nesting again in a well-wooded part of the gritstone Peak District fledged 2 young from a tree approximately 400m from their 2019 breeding location. Numerous sightings across the SPRSG area through the season bode well for future breeding. No ringing was undertaken this year, predominantly due to COVID restrictions.

## Other Data

### Yorkshire

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

**Level of monitoring:** Moderate, covering most known breeding areas.

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

**Breeding:** Limited monitoring was undertaken in 2020 with confirmed results shown in the table below. As elsewhere, the overall figures were very much Covid-affected.

AREA	TERR. PAIRS	PAIRS BRED	PAIRS SUCC.	YOUNG
West Yorkshire	17 (39)	14 (39)	11 (25)	21 (37)
North Yorkshire	26 (43)	25 (42)	22 (38)	35 (54)
East Yorkshire	7 (7)	7 (7)	7 (6)	9 (9)
Totals	50 (89)	46 (88)	40 (69)	65 (100)
Average young raised per successful pair (2019 figures in brackets): 1.63 (1.45)				

Additional to the North Yorkshire figures shown, it is highly probable that successful breeding by one pair occurred in Swaledale. Absolute confirmation was not possible, but the reported behaviour is strongly indicative that such a breakthrough has occurred. Sightings of kites continue to be reported from widespread areas, showing that they have become relatively commonplace just over 20 years since their reintroduction to Yorkshire. Persecution issues have been comprehensively covered in previous issues of the Review. Such a threat remains, particularly during times of Covid lockdown when it is known that persecution levels, generally, increased significantly. As Nidderdale has featured strongly in the persecution of a number of species, it is worth repeating the link, provided in the 2019 Review, to the AONB Authority's Evidence Report which forms part of its Management Plan for the period 2019 to 2024:

<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, whilst several more cases are understood to be in the hands of North Yorkshire Police.

Roost counts are held each January. The 2020 count over 9 locations produced a total of 457 birds, as shown below. The peak figures, as was also the case in 2019, occurred at Harewood (125) and Nunburnholme (94)

West Yorkshire	162
North Yorkshire	201
East Yorkshire	94
Total	457

### 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, not least the impact of the Coronavirus, monitoring to the same level as in previous years was not achieved.

Sadly, on an estate where we are aware of it being the ‘heartland’ of kites in East Yorkshire we have no access except monitoring from the public highway. At one of the viewing areas, replacing straw bales, a hedge of evergreens has been planted on estate land, blocking the view, and further along, the double row of Leylandii planted near Nunburnholme have reached a height making observing almost impossible. This, along with Covid restrictions meant that the annual communal roost count in January 2021 didn’t take place.

Kites continue to move off the Wolds and we continue to receive sightings from further to the east of the county. This resulted in us finding the possibility of 3 new nest locations. We continue to have concern of the increase in sightings from the north of East Yorkshire - birds heading towards the grouse shooting moorland of North Yorkshire.

Of interest, Yorkshire’s oldest breeding male Red Kite known to us raised at least one young, taking the total of his offspring to 39.

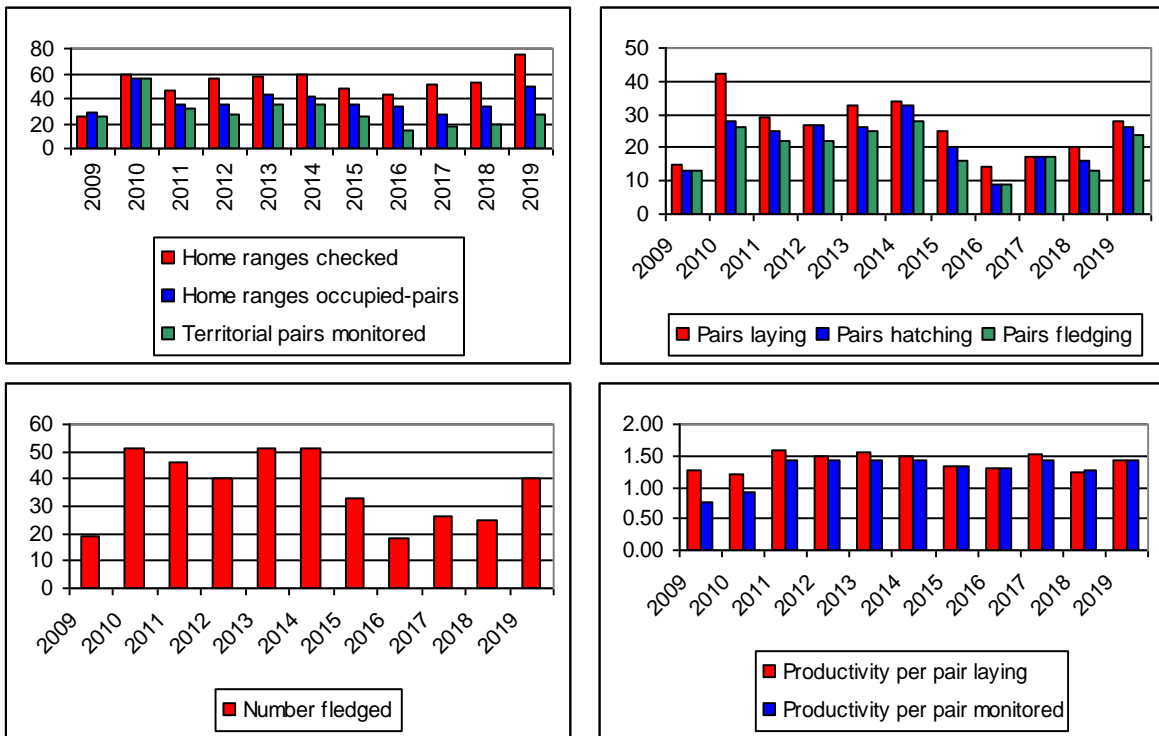
East Yorkshire is a massive area and we are confident there will have been other breeding pairs that we are not aware of. We are confident that there are now well in excess of 100 Red Kites in the area of this county.

### NERF regional summary

Red Kite numbers continue to increase, albeit more slowly in NE England, where persecution is a major problem. Expansion into north-western parts of England appears to be very slow despite increased sightings of passage birds, but some of these are beginning to linger.

*NERF is grateful to Nigel Puckrin and Doug Simpson MBE for compiling the above account.*

## Comparative data 2009-2020



## Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*



David Steel

## UK population estimate

Common Buzzard remains the UK's most abundant raptor, by some distance.

The latest population estimate by the Avian Population Estimate Panel published in February 2020 (Woodward, I. *et al.* APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104) puts this at 61500 – 85000 pairs for GB in 2016.

The BTO estimated trends derived from Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) information show continued growth since 2016 with an annual increase of 8 % over the period 2018 – 19 and over the 23 years between 1995 and 2019 a very impressive increase of 223 % (due to Covid-19 this species could not be covered in the 2020 Report). The expansion of the breeding distribution of Buzzards from west to east is also apparent within the BTO regional data. Increases are generally evident across all of the areas covered by NERF member groups.



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

A rash of offences were confirmed or were being investigated by the RSPB between 23rd March to 14th May 2020 during the early Covid 19 'lockdown' restrictions. Perhaps this was because offenders considered they might be less likely to be detected. Buzzards were a particular target during this period when –

-10 were confirmed shot; one was suspected shot but not recovered; 11 were suspected poisoned and sent for toxicology tests and another 2 were suspected of being illegally killed and sent for post-mortem.

Cases within the NERF areas included –

- in Durham 2 were found in Teesdale poisoned with a banned pesticide. Police investigations continue.

- in the Peak District NP one was found with lead shot in September and one found in 2019 was confirmed in January 2020 to have been poisoned with alphachlorelose on a Red-legged Partridge corpse.

- in the North Yorks Moors 5 were found dead, hidden under a wall, of which 4 contained pieces of shot.

At another site in North Yorkshire the RSPB observed an individual using a tethered Eagle Owl as a lure and then shooting 2 Buzzards that were attracted. However despite Police finding an Eagle Owl at a nearby gamekeeper's house the CPS decided that the evidence wasn't strong enough to tie the two together. The story received widespread media coverage, and is reported in more detail on the website [www.raptorforum.co.uk](http://www.raptorforum.co.uk)

Further details of some incidents are contained within some of the respective group accounts. It is incontrovertible that this is a "blackhole" species in many areas.

## 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
CaRSG	9	9	0	0	2	2	2	2	3	1.50	1.50
ChRSG	10	10	2	0	10	10	10	10	20	2.00	2.00
DUBSG	38	38	NC	NC	6	6	6	6	7	1.17	1.17
MRG	166	68	NC	NC	18	18	18	18	25	1.39	1.39
NRG	86	80	NC	NC	70	61	61	58	91	1.49	1.30
NYMUBSG	3	3	0	0	2	1	1	1	2	2.00	1.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>1.51*</b>	<b>1.37*</b>

\*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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

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 shotgun damage are seen occasionally.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Calderdale has large expanses of mature woodland habitat and sightings of this species have been increasing year on year throughout the study area. However, the limited resources within the study group inevitably meant that, as in previous years, the amount of time available to monitor the species during 2020 was limited. The travel restrictions imposed because of Covid -19 further exacerbated the situation and only 9 territories were checked at the start of the season. By comparisons 5 pairs were located in 2019.

All of the territories checked were occupied by pairs and it is highly likely that several additional pairs were successful as well as the 2 pairs that were proven to have fledged young.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

The species is common and widespread across the County. Up to 10 pairs are monitored in the Wirral as part of an ongoing wing tagging project.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The total number of reports of Buzzards across the whole County submitted to the Durham Bird Club was down around 30%, reflecting the impact of Covid 19 travel restrictions on observations. This was also evident in the monitoring of upland pairs where only the most visible birds in observer “hotspots” produced reports through to known outcomes.

Productivity at 1.16 young was down from 1.66 in 2019, but because of patchy monitoring it is impossible to say whether this is representative of a genuine decrease across the upland population.

A poisoning incident where two birds were found dead in Teesdale woodland is still under investigation.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Over 560 records from 166 locations harvested from *manchesterbirding.com* and members produced 18 confirmed breeding records and a minimum of 23 young and 50 sites where breeding was probable. A further 21 locations recorded this species in the breeding season, but there were not enough records to be certain of probable or confirmed breeding.

Of the successful nests, 14 only had one chick (at one of these, a 2nd chick failed to survive), 3 had 2 chicks and at one 3 young fledged. The spread of RHD (Rabbit haemorrhagic disease) may account for this low productivity. There were undoubtedly more undiscovered nests and young – this species is surprisingly secretive when nesting. David Steel again monitored the mosslands and found 14 territories there.

Notable groups in spring included 15 on the mosslands on 7th February and 12 at Pennington Flash on 1st March. In autumn, the ‘vismig’ point at Winter Hill found 24 and 38 on 14th and 18th September respectively.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Although the normal four areas were covered within the NRG recording area, two were badly affected by Covid 19 restrictions, so the coverage was less thorough in those areas.

*Border Forest, Kielder:* coverage was good with 45 nests found, 37 of which fledged 55 young. It should be noted that in this study nests are recorded as either fledging or failing but no reasons for failure are known.

*Slaley Forest:* coverage was good with 10 nests found; 9 hatched eggs and 6 went on to fledge 11 chicks.

*South Cheviots/MOD Otterburn:* The study was affected by surveyors having to “catch-up” on other raptors, so the Buzzard numbers recorded reflect the reduced time spent. Only a third of the usual home ranges were covered, where 15 nests fledged 25 chicks.

*North Cheviots:* Coverage was poor here too with a very late start due to the restrictions, and the need to monitor other raptor species. Ten nests were recorded but the outcomes were unknown

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

Pushing the legality of outdoor access during the “lockdown” to the limit one group member managed to check a few sites to the north of the NYMs in late March-early April. At one a Goshawk nest had been very clearly refurbished in a different style to that of Goshawk and a pair of Buzzards was displaying outside the wood. Unfortunately, it was not possible to revisit the site so the outcome was not known. At another, a new nest displayed several pieces of fresh down and Buzzards were overhead “alarming” at the human presence at the nest. This visit was in late March, on the next visit in early April the nest looked no different apart from the down having disappeared and there being no sign of the birds. The nest being no more than 100m from the edge of a grouse moor, persecution was considered the most likely cause for failure.

The NYMs were very much in the news from May onwards for several months when two specific persecution incidents came to light. A total of 5 dead Buzzards were located secreted under a drystone wall in Bransdale, of which 4 were proven to have been shot. Around the same time on another grouse moor estate, an adult Goshawk was filmed confined in a crow trap and surrounded by dead Jackdaws as a man approached, entered the trap, and brutally despatched the bird. These incidents soon became high profile and resulted in quite incriminating media coverage with articles in The Times and on Channel 4 news, and ultimately a 30 minute programme on the same channel covering an autumn grouse-shoot day on the estate where the Goshawk incident occurred; this very much to the obvious discomfiture of those involved with the shoot.

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

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

We have seen a vast improvement in the breeding success and range of Common Buzzard in much of the group’s study area. However, this success has not been replicated on the east side of the Peak District National Park.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

The group no longer systematically monitors the species as it is widespread and is well established across the whole of the study area. Notable counts included 53 seen in c.8 hours in NE Derbyshire, while doing a Hobby round-up, and 7 birds soaring over a Chesterfield suburb during a “lockdown” garden watch on 12th April.

### NERF regional summary

Across the NERF area Common Buzzards continue to increase generally in both numbers and range but there remain “holes” where more birds should be present.

The reasons for this are undoubtedly linked to local persecutions and evidence of this was provided by the number of cases reported by the RSPB over less than a two month period. A total of 24 birds were found shot, killed illegally or suspected of being poisoned with results awaited.

With reduced monitoring by the study groups taking place, due to Covid 19 restrictions curtailing fieldwork, it seems probable that the perpetrators of these crimes expected to remain undetected. This is somewhat analogous to the situation during the period of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001 when no upland bird monitoring took place, and on the resumption of this work substantial changes were noted in many areas. However in 2020 the groups were still able to check 312 ranges and found only 208 to be occupied by pairs – a substantial fall of 29% from the previous year.

The figures for young fledged per pair laying (average 1.5) and per territorial pair monitored (average 1.37) both showed increases over the respective figures for 2020 despite the levels of recorded persecution.

### Barn Owl *Tyto alba*



Austin Morley

### 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.* (APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104) gives a figure of 4000 -14000. 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, which is reflected in the relatively wide spread above.

## 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 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	17	9	0	0	9	9	9	9	24	2.66	2.66
CaRSG	14	14	0	0	13	13	12	12	34	2.62	2.62
ChRSG	329	205	2	12	205	200	200	197	426	2.13	2.08
MRG	137	74	8	5	69	69	67	198	198+	2.87	2.87
PDRSG	10	8	NC	NC	6	6	6	6	19	3.17	3.17
NRG	212	127	0	3	124	124	124	121	440	3.55	3.55
SPRSG*	14	14	0	1	13	13	12	11	15	1.15	1.15
NYMUBSG	38	25	2	1	24	24	23	23	86	3.58	3.58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>1242</b>	<b>2.71</b>	<b>2.68</b>

\*incomplete data – see text

## 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.

The usage of second-generation rodenticides is becoming a recognised issue for barn owls on a national scale. The poisoned rodents are easier to catch, therefore consumed.

## 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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Covid-related restrictions reduced the amount of Barn Owl monitoring that could be carried out in 2020, with only around half of the usual sites being checked.

The monitoring that was possible revealed a mixed year for the species in Bowland in 2020. Many traditional sites were unoccupied, and where pairs did breed, some clutch sizes were low (2 or 3 chicks). However, in some parts of the study area pairs did raise large brood sizes (5 or 6 chicks). It was not clear why there was a difference in productivity between different parts of the study area.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

Calderdale does not hold a large population of Barn Owls; however, the numbers have increased over recent years. After a very productive 2018 when 37 chicks fledged from 14 pairs the population crashed in 2019. During last year only 3 pairs produced 7 young, almost certainly due to a parallel crash in the vole population.

In 2020 the population recovered, and the group recorded 164 sightings across the year. Unfortunately, the number of sightings didn't translate into a large number of fledglings being produced. The table indicates an average of 2.62 young per successful pair; however, not all of the nests were accessible, and the number of fledglings may have been slightly higher.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Covid had a slight impact on the early monitoring of nest boxes. A key part of this is communication with farmers and landowners, to gain access and feedback results.

A good year for field voles combined with the early settled warm spring weather signalled an early breeding effort. This momentum in breeding effort slowed as the late spring early summer weather worsened causing some deaths in unfledged birds through starvation.

Breeding output was impacted by this mortality; however, the output was still high enough to sustain the population and, in most areas, increase the owls' status.

An assessment of Barn Owl ringing recoveries over the last 10 years in Cheshire shows an average movement of 8.6km, 86% of recoveries were first year birds, the vast majority found were road traffic accidents.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

There are no sample study areas that are systematically monitored by the group. There were clear visible indications on the ground over rough grass pasture and moorland of 2020 being an exceptionally "good" vole year, so it was no surprise that there was a very significant

increase in the number of reports of birds at a wide variety of locations and altitudes. In one small upland valley area adults could be seen in daytime hunting provisioning nests in 5 separate field barns. Overall, this was probably the strongest showing for several years which was a situation repeated across the county as a whole.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

A similar number of pairs (69) bred and were followed to outcome as in 2019, but the number of chicks was down by 30 from 228+ to 198+, thus lowering the average of young fledged by 0.81. This is presumed to be weather-related. February 2019 was exceptionally warm compared with February 2020 and perhaps brought more females into breeding condition. Even though there was a spell of fine weather April-May 2020, this did not benefit the vole population as it was exceptionally dry. At 12 sites, the exact number of chicks was not known though at least one fledged, so the total number of chicks is, as usual, an under-estimate. A Kestrel laid 4 eggs in the tunnel entrance of a box where Barn Owls had 4 young, but the eggs were deserted and only one remained by 1st June.

At one site with 5 chicks, 3 more of a similar age were introduced and all fledged. These 3 orphans had been taken to our local raptor rescue centre having been handed in to another centre by someone who said he had found them in Preston town centre.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

With the Barn Owl's prolonged nesting season this was one species which was least affected by Covid restrictions, apart from some early visits. One study area was not covered at all, and at others odd nest sites were not visited because of the restrictions.

2020 was an excellent year, and with a high vole and wood mouse populations in Northumberland, the Barn Owl enjoyed one of its best nesting seasons ever.

A total of 127 nests were found. 124 laid eggs and 119 nests fledged a huge 440 chicks this compares with 90 nests fledging 193 chicks in 2019.

Some big clutches were reported; in the MOD Otterburn study a clutch of 7 eggs all fledged but a 2nd clutch of 8 eggs failed to hatch, and in the lowland study a brood of 10 chicks all fledged.

Thanks again go to Phil Hanmar for his records from his large lowland study.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

The data result from the nest box scheme operated for the species by the South Cleveland RG to the north of the NYMs. Of the 86 chicks known to fledge, 78 were ringed. Occupation and productivity levels were very much on a par with those for 2019. Again, occupation of boxes was good at 68% with all pairs bar one, breeding successfully, and broods, again, were mainly on the small side: 5 broods of 2 chicks; 7 of 3; 8 of 4; 1 of 5 and 2 of 6. Winter casualties were reasonably low with most recoveries occurring close to the ringing sites. However, 2 birds moved west 44km and 36km respectively.



The data below are from the East Cleveland Barn Owl Scheme, a project which expanded significantly from the nest box operation monitored by the late Geoff Myers. The data are not included in the figures in the NERF data above. The results from it are very impressive. From the position of 18 boxes available at sites in 2018, in readiness for the 2021 season there are now 108 boxes *in situ* at 80 sites. Most of these are on the Tees Plain. The scheme operators, Colin Gibson and Kate Bartram, have taken considerable care to avoid encroaching on the South Cleveland RG's areas of operation. However, many boxes are sited adjacent to the NYM boundaries to the north and north-west so these birds are extremely well catered for with nest boxes available within and beyond the northern areas of the national park. Information received from contacts across the NYMs clearly indicates this species is increasing and thriving just about everywhere away from the uplands.

### East Cleveland Barn Owl Project.

Year	Number of sites	Number occupied	Number successful	Number of young
2019	48	26	20	66
2020	78	41	32	83

### Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Barn Owls continue to expand in the study area. Several of the nest boxes we have erected over the last 5 years are now occupied annually, alongside several natural sites.

Unfortunately, time constraints restricted the number of sites that could be checked in 2020.

### 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

Of 3 pairs monitored on one estate, one fledged 3 young, one laid but eggs did not hatch and one pair's nest was not found. Another 10 pairs were reported to have bred successfully within the SPRSG area - with the exception of one brood, where 3 young were ringed, numbers of fledged young are not known so these have been included in the table as minimum one young fledged each. In one other pair the brood disappeared at an early stage.

### Covid Impacts on monitoring

The impact of COVID was mainly felt during the early monitoring, however given the long breeding cycle of this owl, most groups were able to catch up, therefore, the overall impacts were minimised.

## NERF regional summary

Overall, 2020 can be classified 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.

The last few years have seen the Barn Owl population continue to grow in the NERF area and 2020 followed this trend, even with reduced monitoring. The continued provision of boxes by many Barn Owl groups throughout the country is a major factor in this success.

## Barn Owl Trust Overview

Barn Owl nesting occupancy in 2020 was 8.5% less than the average of all previous years, making it a poor year for prospecting adults, but by no means dismal. Given the lockdown disruptions of 2020, it seems reasonable to ask: How reliable is our estimate of nesting occupancy? For it to be comparable with previous years, the sites checked during 2020 should have been representative of the ones usually visited. However, it seems plausible that some bias in favour of reliable sites might have crept in during 2020, albeit unintentionally. After all, given that time available for field work was curtailed, it would have been sensible to try and make the most of it. If reliable sites were selected, this could have artificially inflated the nesting occupancy, meaning that the rather low 25.5% might actually be an overestimate. Brood size, on the other hand, should be less susceptible than nesting occupancy to bias stemming from selective monitoring. The dip of 14.4% in average brood size is the second most negative change in brood size observed to date in the *State of the UK Barn Owl Population* reports, suggesting that 2020 contributed considerably fewer new recruits than a normal breeding period should. Although large broods of eight and nine were recorded in Northumberland and Staffordshire, respectively, other nests were found to have failed at the egg stage in Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Derbyshire, and the Tees Valley. The general decrease is more extreme in brood size than in nesting occupancy. This is unusual because as Figure 1 shows, although brood size and nesting occupancy have had similar patterns, fluctuations in brood size have nearly always been more moderate. In terms of weather, 2020 figures from the Met Office show that 10 out of 12 months were warmer than usual, sometimes markedly so, and that rainfall went from one extreme to another over the course of the season. Although the 2019/2020 winter was fairly mild, February was the wettest on record since 1862, which must have left some female owls struggling to reach breeding condition (Dadem *et al.* 2011). March was slightly warm and fairly dry, so conditions in certain areas must have been quite favourable for courtship. As the season progressed the rainfall deficit became much more acute in April (40% of average) and May (47%) and, in combination with markedly high temperatures, this must have inhibited the emerging spring vegetation. Given the dependence of Field Voles on fresh growth, it seems likely that poor prey delivery rates contributed to compromised incubation or starving Barn Owl nestlings. In June the pendulum swung, but too far, and owlets would have been growing and fledging in very wet conditions right through to September. In conclusion, a clear message came from groups in north Berkshire/south Buckinghamshire, Leicestershire, north Norfolk, Shropshire, Suffolk, Warwickshire and Yorkshire: 2020 was a very bad year, and in some cases the worst recorded so far.

## Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*



Bob Kenworthy

### UK population estimate

In 2020 the population was estimated at 50000 pairs (Woodward, I. *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: British Birds 113:69-104). 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! Due to Covid-19 it was not possible for BBS to monitor this species sufficiently in 2020.

### 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 pens. 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 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
CaRSG	20	13	8	0	8	8	8	8	10	1.25	1.25
ChRG	10	10	1	0	10	10	9	9	17	1.70	1.70
MRG	89	32	NC	1	32	31	31	31	50+	1.61	1.56
NRG	293	130	1	0	122	121	103	102	295	2.44	2.42
NYMUBSG	10	5	0	0	5	5	5	5	10	2.00	2.00
PDRSG	1	1	NC	NC	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	1.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>2.18</b>	<b>2.15</b>

## Group Reports

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

During 2019 the localised vole crash severely impacted Tawny Owls across the study area and only 3 pairs collectively raised 4 young. Visits to the traditional home ranges in early spring of 2020, prior to the first Covid-19 lockdown, revealed that 13 pairs had taken up territory. The fact that the birds nest in the valleys coupled with the relaxation of the travel restrictions, permitting local exercise, enabled the group to continue to monitor 8 nests. This was a 100% increase over 2019 however; productivity remained disappointingly low at 1.25 per nest.

### Cheshire Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

Work with Chester University looking at prey selection commenced this year, a 3 year study.

### 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

Given the absence of detailed study, Covid travel restrictions in springtime did not really impact levels of recording.

The species attracts only casual reports and there are no study programmes. Tawny Owls remain common and widespread for the county as a whole. They are present in the western uplands in all wooded valleys and plantations up to the highest tree-lines. Breeding productivity in 2020 was thought to be quite high.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Covid lockdown in fine weather in May meant that 27 young branched chicks arrived at our local raptor rescue centre. Where the origins of these were known they have been included as sites. Of these, 24 were subsequently released in suitable woodlands in September and it was possible to ring 10 of these before release. The 1st juvenile was found on the early date of 20th February and taken into care as drenched, and a sibling followed 2 weeks later; a 3rd chick fledged normally. It is likely many more fledged, given the numbers of single branched juveniles picked up by members of the general public on permitted exercise.

A study by RSPCA staff concluded that hand-rearing does not appear to affect the birds' instinctive behaviour or post-release survival. (Bennett, J.A. and Routh, A. 2000. Post-release survival of hand-reared Tawny Owls (*Strix aluco*). *Animal Welfare* Volume 9 Number 3 pp 317-321).

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

After the poor year of 2019, 2020 came in on a "whirlwind" with lockdown due to Covid-19 restrictions being lifted in May just in time for most field workers to get round their nest boxes, so in the end, only a few broods went unrecorded.

2020 was a very good nesting season with high vole populations right across Northumberland and the owls did very well.

293 boxes were checked - only a slight reduction on 2019; 130 held pairs, (81 in 2019), of these 102 were successful fledging 295 chicks, (only 98 chicks in 2019). At Kielder and the Cheviots the predominant brood size was 4.

In the MOD Otterburn /south Cheviots study as an example, 33 boxes were checked, 16 pairs nested, fledging 31 chicks but due to the restrictions, an additional 8 boxes were not visited at all, 3 boxes fledged unrecorded broods, and in a study on Gibside NT, only 2 boxes had known outcomes.

Both the Slaley Forest and MOD Otterburn/south Cheviots study areas are continuing to increase their box numbers over the next few years.

In the Kielder Forest B study, one nest failed on eggs due to Pine Marten predation; this might become an increasing problem in future.

Thanks are due once again to Phil Hanmer for the data from his lowland study.

### 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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

The data in the table below refers only to the results accruing from the South Cleveland RG nestbox operation. Being an early nesting species, the required checks of the owl boxes fell well within the Covid-19 first lockdown period. Consequently only a small proportion, (roughly 30% of normal), could be visited and then only the once, that being during the normal ringing period of late-April/early-May. Thanks are due to those homeowners who willingly allowed access to their boxes under somewhat dubious legitimate circumstances! One brood of 3 had to be left unringed as the hen bird vigorously and persistently attacked the ringer who deemed discretion the better part of valour and retreated ignominiously to the safety of his car! To judge from the returns from just the 10 boxes checked, the restrictions imposed by the pandemic would seem to have prevented a very successful season being recorded for the species.

### 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	.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
2017-20	<b>98</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>1.79</b>

### Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 4

One late-nesting Tawny Owl was reported at a private residence (one chick ringed 7 days old 7th June). Covid restrictions meant that no other monitoring of Tawny Owls took place in 2020.

### NERF regional summary

It would appear that in those NERF areas where annual box studies permitted some degree of productivity monitoring that Tawny Owls had quite a successful season in 2020. It is a pity that Covid restrictions in place over a crucial period of the nesting cycle prevented more

complete monitoring of populations. It will be interesting to see how these birds fare next season when it is quite likely vole numbers will be appreciably lower.

### Little Owl *Athene noctua*



Steve Burke

### UK population estimate

The current estimate is 3600 pairs (summer) as at 2016 (Woodward, I. *et al.* 2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104). The 2019 and 2020 BBS reports show a 45% increase 2019-20 and a 61% decrease 1995-2018 – statistics were incomplete in 2020 due to Covid-19. The population has halved since the 1968-72 BTO Atlas. Similarly in mainland Europe the decline of Little Owl has resulted in its listing as a Species of European Conservation Concern.

### Conservation status

UK: Not assessed (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 BirdTrends). There is as yet little direct evidence to explain the losses in the UK but continental studies suggest poor survival rates for juveniles to be a primary driver linked to changes in farming practices and habitat. <https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/species-focus/little-owl>. The BTO includes Little Owl in its Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) scheme and this showed most recently a slight upturn in survival rates, although not significant enough to change the

population trend from being downward. Further work has been pursued by the BTO in relation to more targeted and repeat censuses of Little Owl including the use of recorded calls to improve records.

### 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
CaRSG	36	12	18	0	5	5	5	5	11	2.20	2.20
ChRG	10	9	2	0	8	8	8	7	19	2.38	2.38
MRG	30	30	NC	NC	7	7	7	6	14	2.00	2.00
SPRSG	3	3	0	0	3	3	3	3	3	1.00	1.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>2.04</b>	<b>2.04</b>

### Group Reports

#### Bowland Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

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; at least one long-term monitoring study.

**Covid impact score:** 2

Some minor impact on early site visits. Following the population crash in 2019 when only 2 pairs fledged young; 2020 saw a significant improvement in both the numbers successfully breeding and the numbers of young fledging. The group monitored less than 50% of the occupied territories of this charismatic species during 2020 and this is something that the group needs to address going forward.



### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Uncommon, thinly distributed resident, declining. Nestbox programme started by the group and Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Low number of nests monitored, due to significant Covid impact. The feeling is that there is a decline in occupied territories year on year.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

There are no systematic studies monitoring the species. Some Covid impact on fieldwork this season. Little Owls can be most prominent in early spring when territorial birds appear at familiar daytime perches and often call.

No systematic monitoring of sample study areas takes place though casual records in the western uplands continue to show Little Owls to be an uncommon, probably scarce, resident in valleys and moorland edge habitats with a preference for nesting in farm buildings, isolated barns and quarries up to about 400 metres a.s.l.

It continues to be widely reported by Durham BC members, mainly at traditional lowland sites in the east though with limited confirmations of breeding outcomes. Across the county the population is considered to be in decline though "good" vole years such as in 2020 will no doubt go some way to help.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

Birds were reported at 30 sites with confirmed breeding at 6 of these. Several were found when checking Barn Owls. Given their extremely sedentary habits, it is likely that there was breeding or attempted breeding at the remaining 23 sites.

Breeding at 3 sites could not be followed up due to Covid restrictions.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 4

Fieldwork wholly interrupted by restrictive Covid measures.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

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. Monitoring is carried out if pairs/nests are discovered.

## South Peak Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

The species is not monitored on a regular basis by the group, but is a fairly common resident within the area. It was noted to have bred successfully at 3 sites in the SPRSG area, though numbers of young are not known (recorded as minimum one per pair in Table).

## 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 out-buildings. 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 higher than 2019. 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. 2020 was considered a good vole year and this may be reflected in the increased productivity noted.

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

## Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*



Mike Price

## UK population estimate

The latest population estimate is 1800-6000 pairs (Woodward, I. *et al.* 2020. APEP 4: British Birds 113: 69-104). 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. 155-234

pairs were reported to RBBP in 2019 (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704). Because of its relatively recent inclusion in the RBBP list no long term trend is available.

### 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
CaRSG	10	7	0	0	7	5	5	5	13*	2.6	1.86
MRG	18	18	NC	NC	18	18	18	15	35	1.94	1.94
NRG	44	29	1	2	27	27	26	26	36	1.33	1.33
SPRSG	4	4	0	0	3	3	3	3	6	2.00	2.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>1.70</b>	<b>1.64</b>

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The fortunes of Long-eared Owls fluctuate widely within the study area. In the 2018 breeding season 37 chicks fledged from 14 pairs. The following year productivity fell dramatically when 3 pairs produced 6 young. This was undoubtedly caused by the localised vole crash, which also affected several other species that have a high dependency on voles as prey. Whilst 2020 saw a 100% increase in recorded fledglings with 11 young being observed, productivity remained disappointingly low.

Unfortunately; because of the Covid-19 travel restrictions imposed by the Government during the second lockdown, 2 nests were not visited at the point when the young would have been expected to fledge. However, the group members who monitor those nests have assumed that a minimum of one chick per nest would have fledged and therefore the number of chicks reported in the table has been increased by 2 to accommodate that assumption.

### Cheshire and Wirral Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Two successful breeding attempts were reported in the county; unfortunately the full details of the breeding attempts are unavailable.

### 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

There are currently no active studies of this much under-recorded and elusive owl species. The work of the Durham Bird Club in 2017, through a special and concentrated survey, revealed an amazing 80+ pairs breeding in the county but without such intense effort the picture again becomes vague. Long-eared Owls were seen or heard in a few upland locations in conifer plantations and scrub bordering rough pasture and moorland edge. Breeding will no doubt have benefited from the high numbers of voles present throughout the year.

### Manchester Raptor Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

18 nests were located in 11 areas, 5 areas having clusters of nests. At one nest, a single chick hatched but died; at another (actual nest not found) there was a distraction display but despite repeated watches no young were seen, and a sick juvenile was brought into our local raptor rescue centre from a site in Cheshire but within our recording area; unfortunately, this died in care.

A much better result than 2019 thanks to local observers, one of whom has studied his area for many years now.

All except 2 of the sites were in the uplands in the east of the county. There were undoubtedly breeding birds in the Wigan area but these are difficult to locate as frequently in inaccessible wetlands.

### **Northumbria Ringing 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

2020 was a good year with high vole and wood mouse populations no doubt helping in the high success of many nests: the disparity between the thriving lowland areas and the struggling upland areas is unexplained.

A great effort was made in a new study area based round Alnwick in the north of the county, where a large number of new territories were discovered, a lot of the work being done by bicycle, listening for calling chicks in the evening. In this study 22 nest sites fledged at least 29 chicks; this great effort was carried out by Dr Mark Eaton (RBBP).

In the rest of the county:

The Kielder Forest study recorded 7 occupied territories, 5 pairs fledged at least 7 chicks, a poor number of occupied territories when compared to the Alnwick study area.

The coastal area and north of Newcastle also reported a few broods of fledged Long-eared Owls.

2020 was excellent year in the county. We suspect that Northumberland could have a similar number and density of breeding Long-eared Owls as Durham, at least in the lowland population, if more study work was undertaken.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

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. Once again 2020 there was little evidence of occupation at historic sites during the early part of the season. However, there were indications that some pairs bred later in the year; unfortunately time constraints meant that very little monitoring was undertaken in 2020.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

At one site 4 young hatched but following significant disturbance from photographers only 2 young fledged. The other 2 regular sites fledged 2 each. A 4th pair were present but not monitored, though from reports they were likely to have fledged young.

### **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*



Austin Morley

### UK population estimate

Short-eared Owls exhibit significant annual variation in their breeding numbers linked to prey abundance and accurate data is typically extremely hard to come by. Overall, a long term decline in the breeding population has been apparent (BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11) and the UK breeding population is estimated to be within a broad range of 620-2200 pairs (Woodward, I. *et al.* 2020. APEP 4: *British Birds* 113: 69-104). The range reflects the annual population fluctuations as well as the challenges of accurately surveying birds in their core upland breeding areas. This was again deemed a poor year for short-tailed voles (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704)

### 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* 110:502-517) with a reported 60% reduction in range.

### National and regional threat assessment

The species presents a number of very significant challenges to surveying and the accurate assessment of local populations, breeding outcomes and the threats they face are very difficult to achieve. Several NERF member groups do provide a largely consistent monitoring effort over suitable habitat each year which allows a simple but meaningful qualitative assessment of population trends. The underlying reasons explaining the national long term declines remain unclear. Even in good vole years breeding outcomes can be uncertain. Late winter and early spring weather conditions may play a part. Sadly, illegal persecution of this emblematic moorland owl does still occur in our region (see NERF Annual Reviews of 2015 and 2017) which in itself is clearly unacceptable but especially so given the species' scarcity and vulnerable status.

## 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	20	9	0	-	3	3	3	3	6	2.00	2.00
CaRSG	12	4	5	-	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
ChRSG	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
DUBSG	26	16	3	-	16	16	15	15	24	1.50*	1.50*
MRG	4	4	NC	1	3	3	3	2	4+	1.30*	1.30*
NRG	18	15	NC	NC	1	1	1	1	3	3.00	3.00
NYMUBSG	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
PDRMG	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
SPRSG	9	9	NC	NC	1	1	1	1	1+	1.00*	1.00*
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1+</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>38+</b>	<b>1.60*</b>	<b>1.60*</b>

\*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 areas.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least 2 representative study areas.

**Covid impact score:** 4

Following a complete absence of confirmed breeding in Bowland in 2019, there was a welcome return to breeding success in 2020 although distribution was oddly skewed. A decent number of pairs was found in one part of the study area, but none found in another part which usually holds pairs in good vole years. Covid-19 restrictions inevitably reduced the amount fieldwork that could be carried out in 2020, especially during the critical early part of the season. The data presented above is thought to tell only a very partial story for this species in 2020.

### Calderdale Raptor Study Group

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

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage; at least 2 representative study areas.

**Covid impact score: 4**

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact of the group's ability to monitor this species. At the beginning of the year, before the first national lockdown was imposed 17 sightings were reported and 12 home ranges were checked of which 4 were occupied by pairs. A further 5 home ranges were occupied by single birds. It was evident during the early spring that Calderdale was experiencing a vole crash and productivity was predicted to be low. Unfortunately no further observations were undertaken during the breeding season and the outcomes at the 4 sites occupied by pairs remains unknown. As lockdown restrictions were eased later in the year a further 17 casual sightings were recorded.

**Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score: 2**

The species is a scarce winter visitor and migrant with most records from the Dee Estuary. There are occasional sightings in the breeding season on the Cheshire uplands but there was no suggestion of breeding in 2020.

**Durham Upland Bird Study Group**

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

**Level of monitoring:** Good coverage, several large representative areas are studied annually.

**Covid impact score: 3**

Numbers of Short-tailed Field Voles saw a remarkably high peak in many areas of the Durham uplands from early spring and through the summer months. This brought obvious benefits to Short-eared Owls and at least 16 cases of confirmed breeding were recorded. This represents the highest total for many years and may be compared with the previous year when the lowest number for many years had been recorded. A proportion of confirmed breeding records involved just sightings of adults carrying prey or showing defensive display so it wasn't always possible to determine productivity outcomes but several family parties were seen on the wing including at 2 sites where 4 young had fledged and 3 sites each with 2 young. One site failed at egg stage. Surprisingly the uplift didn't appear to be even across the county with northern moors perhaps not enjoying the same increase in the number of pairs as seen elsewhere, suggesting a very local variability in vole numbers. Most observations came in late May and throughout June and early July but earlier access restrictions due to Covid meant that several early pairings may have been missed.

**Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

**Level of monitoring:** Reasonable coverage; at least one study area.

**Covid impact score: 1**

All breeding pairs were found in that part of the West Pennine Moors within the group's study area. Two pairs fledged 3-4 young and one young; one pair was burnt out and another pair failed to breed. A maximum of 12 birds were present in this area at the end of July and in August and up to 6 birds were present in November. (Thanks to S.J. Martin for this data). A maximum of 8 birds wintered on the mosslands in the early winter period, the last record being 9th March. Other early records of 1-2 birds came from 3 other sites. The late-winter period had records from Pennington Flash on 9th September and 5th October, and a wintering bird at Hindley Green in mid-December.



### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

Covid restrictions delayed the start of any survey work so with this in mind the totals are to be taken as a minimum. A total of 5 pairs were found by NRG field workers in 2020 (cf. one pair in 2019), but the outcome was recorded from only one nest in the Border Forest Kielder where 3 chicks fledged.

Some additional data was kindly supplied by a Natural England field worker with another 10 pairs recorded in the county but no outcomes were known. Seven of these pairs were on grouse moors in the south-west. The vole population appeared high in the county and it was expected that a lot of the nests would have successfully fledged young. The data sets have been combined in the table.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The last known nest site, (2018), was the only one specifically checked out and found to be unoccupied. Sightings of these birds were rare this year, the only known records being one on Easington High Moor, 25th March; one on Guisborough Moor on 21st April and one at Scaling Dam Reservoir on 25th November. The Covid restrictions on fieldwork will not have helped but it does seem birds were thinner on the ground than usual all year. This does rather fly in the face of impressions gained from Barn Owl and Kestrel nest returns that vole populations were at a quite healthy level, certainly over the northern parts of the NYMs. It has to be borne in mind though, that this species is never recorded annually in anything other than insignificant numbers across the National Park uplands and located nesting activity is very much the exception rather than the rule. There has been sufficient anecdotal evidence obtained over the years to point to on-going persecution as one factor behind the paucity of breeding records.

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

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

It is thought that numbers of the key prey, Short-tailed Field Vole, were at a low ebb in the study area in 2020, this resulted in very few sightings and no proven breeding attempts. Occasional incidental sightings were recorded.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

In the Upper Derwent 2 sites were occupied and on the Staffordshire Moorlands 4 sites were occupied but the outcomes are unknown. On the Eastern Moors and surrounding areas 3 sites were occupied. Successful breeding was only confirmed at one site where a juvenile was ringed out of the nest (the total number of young is unknown). Of the other 2 sites, the only further information is that an adult at one was killed by a Goshawk.

## NERF regional summary

The results of Short-eared Owl monitoring in 2020 serve to highlight some of the known complexities and anomalies often associated with studies of this species. Looking at the apparent abundance of the preferred prey, Short-tailed Field Vole, and accepting some possible localised variation, it seems that overall vole numbers were at a high peak in the spring and summer in Northumberland, County Durham and the North York Moors. Short-eared Owls were able to take full advantage of this in the former two regions with high breeding numbers and yet, oddly there was no similar response in the North York Moors where Short-eared Owls continued to be scarce. (Data kindly supplied by Prof. X. Lambin, University of Aberdeen, who confirmed that Field Vole numbers in the Kielder Forest study area were indeed at a peak during spring and autumn counts of 2020). Calderdale however reported an apparent crash in Field Vole numbers during the spring which is believed to have impacted on owl breeding success whilst further south in the Peak District both vole and owl numbers were relatively unexceptional throughout. Overall, the number of sites occupied by pairs and those laying eggs increased from 2019 but the marked success in the northern areas was countered by low numbers of breeding pairs in the south to leave 2020 as a good but perhaps not exceptional year. Access restrictions imposed by Covid between March and mid-May meant that no survey work could take place during this critical period and early breeding attempts will not have been identified and some successful nests will have gone unrecorded. The species remains scarce and should be classed as ‘vulnerable and threatened’.

## Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*



Iain Dykes

## 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. The latest RBBP report for 2019 (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704) had no additional data other than that below.

## 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

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.* 2008. *The Eagle Owl in Britain. British Birds* 101:478-490).

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.*).

In an essay on the species, Roy Dennis, the respected conservationist, considers that vagrancy from Europe was likely in the past and, following conservation measures resulting in increased populations in the near continent, are likely to arrive in the future, crossing water being no deterrent. He makes the point that although they may prey on protected species, as well as on rats and crows, we should not condemn them for that if we are true to the principles of nature conservation. (Dennis, Roy. *The assassin of the night. In Cottongrass summer: essays of a naturalist throughout the year.* 2020. pp.152-156.)

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	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

For the 2nd year in a row birds were heard calling early in the year at one traditional site (at a different site to the 2019 records), but no evidence was found of nesting attempts having taken place. Concerns around persecution and disturbance remain.

(The photo above is of the 4 chicks that fledged in 2018, and has recently been made available).

### 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

A bird thought not to be wearing jesses was observed in Cropton Forest on 11th May. It flew off and disappeared after a short period of observation. It is surprising that no more sightings of this bird have surfaced since then.

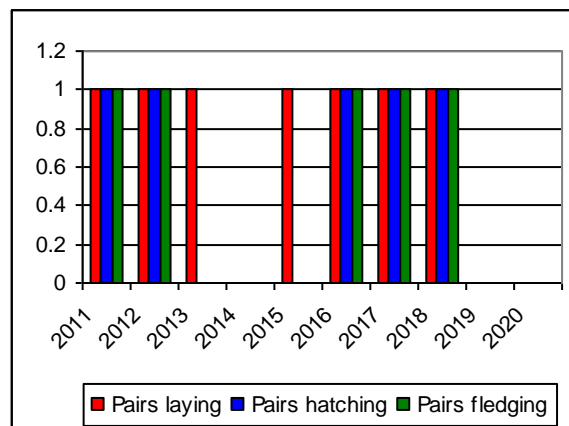
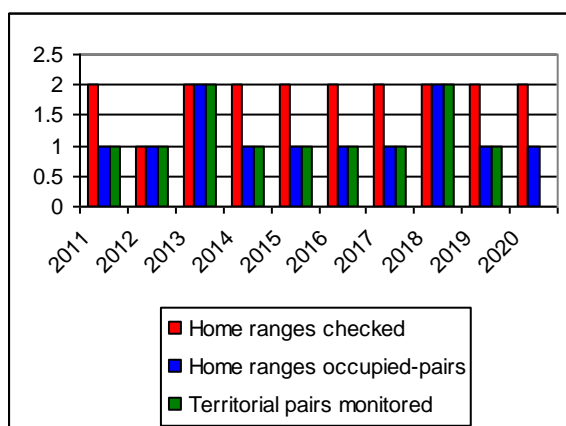
All other groups reported nil sightings.

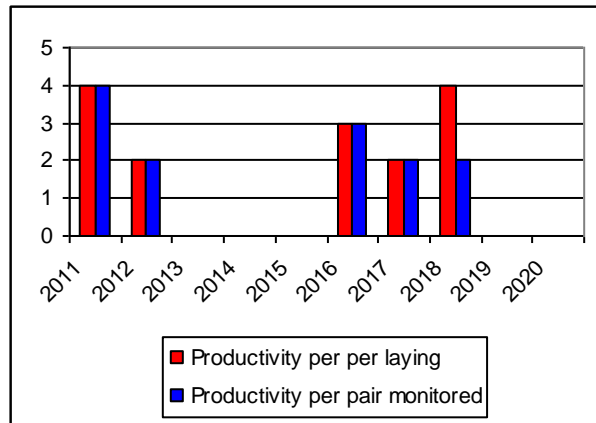
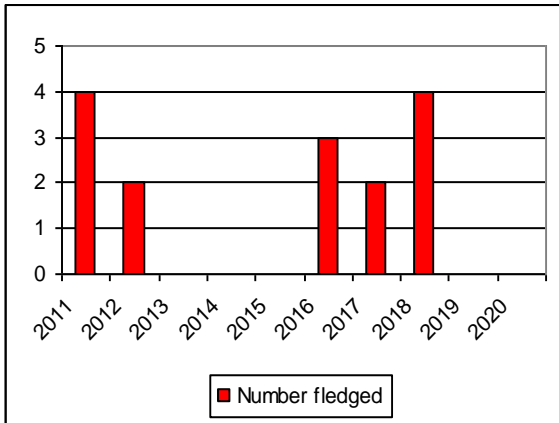
## NERF regional summary

There were no records of breeding by Eagle Owls from any other regional study area 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 causes of 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 2009-2020





## Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*



Gordon Richardson

### 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 2020 for England reported a 2% increase 2019-20 and a 24% reduction in the Kestrel population between 1995 and 2019. 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 which has increased by 233% 1995 - 2019. The most recent UK population estimate of the species, reported by Woodward, I. *et al.* 2020 (APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104), was 31000 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: Least 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: 502-517.

### National and regional threat assessment

As stated above, the Kestrel population is in decline nationally. The reasons for this are unclear but are likely due to multiple factors such as changes in agricultural practice reducing available habitat of prey species. A study on the causes of death in raptors by Newton *et al.*, 1999 showed that the majority of Kestrels had died from collision or starvation. On a local scale, intra-guild predation by Goshawk, particularly in afforested habitats may be an issue, though would be unlikely to impact the national population significantly (Petty *et al.* 2003). In Scotland the decline in Kestrels has been significantly larger than the rest of the UK, and efforts are being made by the Scottish Raptor Monitoring scheme to enhance coverage with the aim of collating local study area trends for the species. Clearly, more research is needed to establish the links between potential factors and the decline in population of the Kestrel.

### 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
CaRSG	25	8	0	0	6	6	6	6	15	2.50	2.50
ChRSG	15	15	1	0	15	15	15	14	62	4.13	4.13
MRG	72	43	NC	NC	43	43	40	40	105*	2.44	2.44
NRG	29	16	6	0	11	11	11	11	35	3.18	3.18
NYMUBSG	16	6	0	0	5	5	5	5	24*	4.80	4.80
SPRSG	4	4	0	0	4	4	4	4	16	4.00	4.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>257*</b>	<b>3.06</b>	<b>3.06</b>

\*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 more accurate values of productivity from 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:** Good coverage; at least 2 monitoring studies or large representative area.

**Covid impact score:** 2

This species is widespread within the study area. Following a very poor year for this species when only 1 of 2 pairs monitored successfully fledged 4 young, a 6-fold increase in successful pairs was recorded in 2020. Whilst the increase in successful breeding pairs is welcome, the productivity of just 2.5 per pair is disappointing.

### Cheshire and Wirral Raptor Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Most pairs were found within Barn Owl nest boxes.

### Durham Upland Bird Study Group

**Extent of coverage:** Upland areas only

**Level of monitoring:** Occurs as a regular breeding species but no active monitoring of a sample is undertaken by the group.

**Covid impact score:** 1

Across the county, Durham BC members continue to submit a wealth of records throughout the year and from across the whole county, suggesting the overall population remains strong. Reports of confirmed breeding increased notably from 2019, including at a variety of upland habitats where what were presumed to be family parties were seen over fell-sides from July onwards. A bird in late September hunting over Burnhope Seat at 746 metres a.s.l. shows that elevation is no obstacle to exploiting the terrain.

### Manchester Raptor Group

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Pairs were known to have fledged young at 12 sites where the number was not known, so the actual number fledged is likely to be well in excess of 105, itself a 25% increase on 2019. Also, this figure does not include 2 chicks from our local Birds of Prey Centre fostered onto a pair with 2 chicks of their own – all fledged. Interesting breeding events included a site where Kestrels evicted Barn Owls, and another where Barn Owls evicted Kestrels on 4 eggs in the entrance tunnel of their box. At a disused railway bridge with 13 arches, 2 pairs bred “back to back” fledging 2 and 3 young.

### Northumbria Ringing 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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

The monitored population of Kestrels in Northumberland is still struggling! Even with 2020 being a great vole year, numbers are still very poor; even allowing for some less coverage because of Covid-19 we would have expected more sites to have been occupied. It was

pleasing to see, though, a large increase in Home Ranges occupied from 2019 (5) to 2020 (16).

As expected, it was the MOD Otterburn/ South Cheviots which had the most occupied Home Ranges with 7, but only 3 pairs monitored which fledged 9 chicks. Interestingly, as in 2019, there were a large number of single birds holding territories (6). One nestbox pair fledged chicks next door to a pair of Barn Owls.

In the Border Forest Kielder only 3 nests were located, the most notable of which was in the centre of the study area where it is now rare to record a single bird due to Goshawk predation. Remarkably the nest fledged 3 chicks.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Covid-19 and its consequent lock-down created a considerable backlog of fieldwork for all species normally covered by the Group. All suffered to some extent. In the case of Kestrels, some boxes were never even checked. The ringing window for most broods was missed, resulting in just 8 chicks being ringed. One regular, reliable site was occupied by Stock Doves, but was off-set by a pair occupying a box at a new location. Another regular box wasn't checked until late in the season when it was obvious from the state of it that successful breeding had taken place. A minimum of one fledgling has been assumed for this nest and included in the total number of fledged young in the table.

At one regular site to the north-west of the study area, there are 3 boxes situated about 200 metres apart in a roughly triangular formation. Two are Kestrel boxes, the other a Barn Owl box. All 3 were occupied by the respective species and all fledged young successfully. Clearly the vole population in the area must have been at an exceptional peak!

### **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	6.91	11	53	4.82	4.42
1987-91	169	22	13.0	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	15.0	12	49	4.08	2.72
2017-20	91	22	24.2	22	92	4.18	4.18



### South Peak Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

The species is not monitored in a widespread way by SPRSG. However, 4 pairs were monitored in the Eastern Moors area, on crags used for rock-climbing. This included one pair successfully fledging 5 chicks, 2 broods of 4, and a minimum of 3 for the final pair. At least 3 further pairs were reported in the immediate surrounding area, including one also fledging 5 young.

### NERF regional summary

Reports from groups were mixed, with Covid-19 affecting some more than others in respect of monitoring. Overall, the minimum number of chicks fledged per pair was very similar to 2019 at 3.06 (3.09 in 2019). Given the concerns over this species' long-term decline, there is scope for prioritising studies into the reasons for this.

### Merlin *Falco columbarius*



Wilf Norman

### 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, I. *et al.* (2020, APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104) estimated the population to be 1150 (890-1450) pairs, based on Ewing *et al.*

The RBBP report for 2019 estimated 279-358 pairs, a weak increase of 94% over the last 25 years (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704).

## 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, most are on the whole happy to tolerate nesting pairs on their moors as they pose little threat to grouse stocks. Clutch and brood losses to foxes, mustelids, other larger raptors and humans do occur but have no significant impact on population levels. Currently, absorption of toxic contaminants in the environment via prey consumption is potentially the most serious threat to the species' welfare and CEH constantly monitors levels through egg and corpse analyses.

Reduced prey availability during the breeding season is an increasing problem in many upland areas and in some is certainly causing pairs severe difficulties provisioning broods. An increasing man-made problem for the birds is that of excessive burning-out of old heather stands on some of the intensive commercial grouse moors, making it difficult for pairs to find suitable nest beds.

If predictions from scientific circles that extreme weather events are likely to become the norm in future prove correct, the probability of wildfires occurring with increasing frequency on tinder-dry moors is cause for real concern for moorland nesting species as is the likelihood of prolonged and excessive rainfall during the crucial brood-rearing phase of the Merlin nesting cycle.

## Group Reports

### **Bowland Raptor Study Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

2020 was a poor year for Merlin in Bowland, with fewer pairs present at the start of the season, and fewer pairs fledging chicks than in previous years. Two broods of young chicks died following a prolonged period of wet and windy weather.

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 which justified its designation as a Special Protection Area.

Coverage was lower in some parts of the study area in 2020 than in previous years due to Covid-related restrictions.

### **Calderdale Raptor Study Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The Government lockdown imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Study Group's ability to monitor this species during 2020. The number of home ranges checked was down by 50% from 2019 and the number of sightings reported during the year was similarly impacted, reduced from 71 in 2019 to 41 in 2020.

The numbers in the table are somewhat speculative in that no nests were located; however 2 juveniles were seen at 2 historical breeding sites during July. It is presumed therefore that breeding took place in those locations and, although not observed, the number of juveniles fledging may have been higher than the 4 individuals that were recorded

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 0

Most records of Merlin occur around the estuaries with on a handful of inland records. A possible pair was recorded hunting co-operatively at Danebower from Cheshire into Derbyshire.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

The vast majority of traditional sites were eventually monitored to a known outcome, so Covid access restrictions in April and the first part of May are considered to have had minimal impact on the final assessment of breeding status. 2020 proved to be another very good year for Merlins in the county with a high number of successful pairs producing the second best-ever number of young. One pair may have failed at egg stage in early May and never went on to re-lay whilst two late nests that were successful were probably re-lays. Eggs at one nest failed to hatch after a prolonged incubation and were probably infertile. Periods of heavy rain in June affected just a single nest where 3 of the 4 fledglings succumbed to chilling or starvation.

Several traditional heather nest patches have been decimated by Heather Beetles resulting in the territory being left unoccupied. Fortunately the damage at present is quite localised across the Durham uplands. North and central estates in Durham are so far not too badly affected but in the SW (Lunedale), one fieldworker had a very depressing day counting at least 4 traditional Merlin territories where Heather Beetle had decimated the nest patches found in earlier years.

Keepers seem to have no answer / treatment to cure the problem.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

25 out of the 28 records in the early winter period came from the mosslands, predominantly Little Woolden Moss, with the last sighting on 18th April. A male and female were both recorded, but only once were they seen together. The 3 other records came from the moors above Horwich (2) and the West Pennine Moors, where a pair was present, although there was no confirmation of a territory.

The first autumn record was a male at Ashworth Moor Reservoir 30th July. From 28th August to 22nd September all records came from the Vismig area around Winter Hill. All were singles except for 2 on 17th and 22nd September. Other than a bird at Carrington Moss

28th August and one at Rumworth 17th October, all other later sightings came from the mosslands, with single males, females and juveniles being recorded. A juvenile female ringed as a chick in the Scottish Highlands in June was controlled in the Winter Hill area, 11th September.

### **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.

#### **Covid impact score: 2**

After many years of poor breeding success, the Merlin had a very productive breeding season in Northumberland in 2020. With the excellent spring weather and very few nest failures, 84 chicks were known to fledge, (50 chicks in 2019). Very good coverage was achieved again with the contract fieldworker David Scott covering the 4 estates in south-west Northumberland and NRG members covering all the areas north of the Tyne. Merlins were again very productive on the grouse moors of the south-west where 9 nests fledged 37 chicks. The rest of the county managed 16 nests which fledged 47 chicks. Both the North Cheviots, and to some extent the MoD Otterburn/South Cheviots areas, suffered from late starts to fieldwork there due to Covid-19 restrictions, so some areas/sites did not receive their normal coverage.

In the MoD Otterburn/South Cheviots area, one pair nested in a tree where the outcome was unknown and one regular site suffered a devastating heather fire in April; it was not known if it was occupied at the time.

In contrast the Border Forest Kielder population although still decreasing, enjoyed high productivity with 4 nests fledging 16 chicks; the best return for over 10 years.

On the south-east Northumberland moors, 2 nests fledged 9 chicks. One of these held a clutch of 6 eggs which all hatched, but the smallest chick died at about 15 days old.

Interestingly, all the young were males.

### **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.

#### **Covid impact score: 3**

Site checks were significantly lower than normal this season, due principally to the Covid lockdown. The need to catch up on other group species projects once the restrictions were lifted had an unavoidable knock-on delaying effect on Merlin fieldwork. However, the majority of the usual productive sites of the last few seasons were checked and productivity from those was broadly similar.

Significant damage to upland habitat was inflicted by Heather Beetles across the national park in 2019. However, it was patchy, extensive on some estates, minimal on others. This spring however, a plague of these creatures of biblical proportions swamped about 70% of the uplands and many villages in the NYMs. Countless numbers of these insects were also swept eastwards by wind and ended washed-up inches deep on the tidelines of local beaches. Those estates that suffered drastic heather devastation were forced to cancel about three-quarters of planned grouse shoots. Fortunately, there was little detrimental effect on the heather quality of Merlin nest beds during the season.



*Chris Bull*

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

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

A slight improvement in productivity compared to 2019, however we had hoped for an improvement in the number of monitored breeding pairs, instead that number has worryingly experienced another slight decline.

34 Home Ranges were checked, 13 were occupied by pairs and one site had at least a female defending the territory.

6 Home Ranges were occupied in Derbyshire, 5 pairs were successful fledging 14 young.

6 Home Ranges were occupied in South Yorkshire, 5 pairs were successful fledging 18 young.

One Home Range was occupied in West Yorkshire. One pair was successful fledging 4 young.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

A good year in the Upper Derwent, where 4 pairs were present. Three pairs bred successfully, breeding behaviour of the 4th pair was witnessed but no nest was found. At least 11 young were fledged from the 3 nests, of which 8 were ringed and PIT tagged. On the Eastern Moors a pair bred for the 3rd consecutive year in a similar location, successfully fledging 4 young which were all ringed. For the 3rd consecutive year there were no pairs confirmed breeding on the Staffordshire moorlands.

### **NERF regional summary**

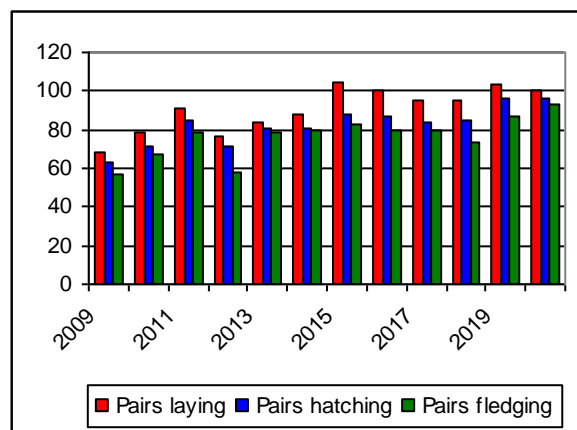
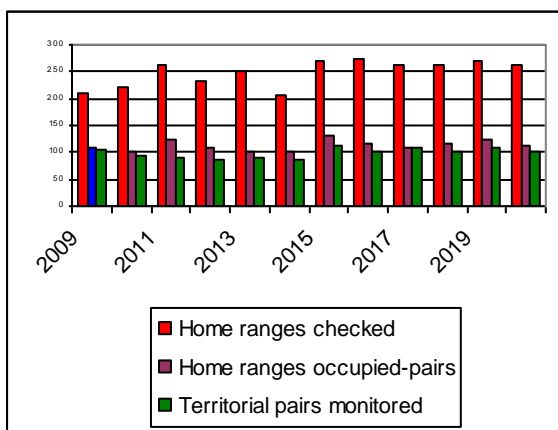
The negative impact of Covid-19 restrictions seems to have varied across raptor groups areas with some, principally Durham and Northumberland, experiencing few problems in relation to normal fieldwork, whilst for others, particularly the NYMs, lockdown created significant difficulties. Nonetheless, despite these, across the board Merlins would appear to have had a better season than of late. That being the assessment, it is annoying that the normal degree of monitoring fieldwork wasn't possible for all groups. Had it been so, productivity returns could well have been much better than those obtained.

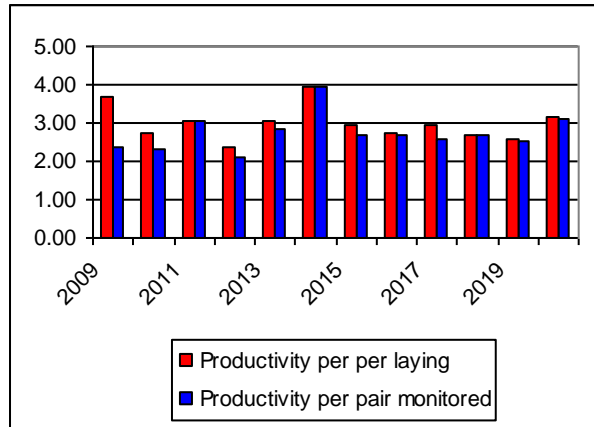
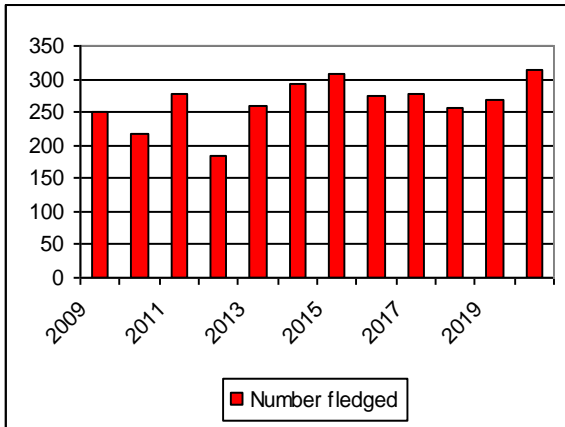
It was not just the NYMs that were blighted by the Heather Beetle outbreaks. Parts of the Durham uplands and the Yorkshire Dales for example were similarly affected though on a much lesser scale than across the NYMs. If, as feared by estate owners and their keepers, the dire prospects for heather degradation in 2021 come to pass, there could easily be problems in store not just for grouse numbers again, but for NYM nesting Merlins if both nest beds and passerine prey levels are severely affected.

### 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
BRSBG	25	8	0	1	7	7	7	5	13	1.86	1.86
CaRSG	5	2	0	0	2	2	2	2	4	2.00	2.00
DUBSG	90	48	1	3	45	44	43	43	144	3.27	3.20
NRG	75	26	2	0	25	25	23	23	84	3.36	3.36
NYMUBSG	27	9	1	1	7	7	6	5	18	2.57	2.57
PDRMG	34	13	1	2	11	11	11	11	36	3.27	3.27
SPRSG	5	5	NC	NC	4	4	4	4	15	3.75	3.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>3.11</b>

### Comparative data 2009-2020





## Hobby *Falco subbuteo*



Mike Price

### UK population estimate

In 2020 the UK population was estimated to be 2050 pairs. (Woodward, I. *et al.* 2020. APEP 4: *British Birds* 113:69-104). 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 (due to Covid-19 this species could not be covered in the 2020 Report). Clements (2001) estimated the UK population to be in the region of 2200 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), and 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, R. *et al.* 2016:

The Hobby in Britain—A revised population estimate. *British Birds* 109, June 2016). RBBP gives a figure of 267-678 breeding pairs in the 2019 report (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704)

### Conservation status

UK Green  
 European Not of concern  
 Global Least concern  
 Listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

### 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
MRG	9	5	4	0	2	2	2	2	3	1.5	1.5
NYMUBSG	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PDRMG	22	22	NC	NC	18	18	17	17	38	2.11	2.11
SPRSG	32	32	0	1	30	28	28	28	45	1.61	1.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>1.79</b>	<b>1.72</b>

### 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. The number of pairs monitored and breeding was higher in 2020 than 2019, but both the number of young per pair laying, and the number of young fledged per territorial pair were marginally down on 2019.

## 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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

As in previous years, several individuals were seen hawking insects over the fells from mid June until mid August, but it is thought 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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Whilst Hobbies are not known to breed in the study area, they are recorded annually within it. The number of sightings does fluctuate widely, but 2020 saw an increase to 18 compared to 14 in 2019. All the sightings occurred between 10th May and 19th September, and all the birds involved were single adults or first summer, (2cy), birds.

Hobbies are notoriously difficult to survey, and bearing in mind the number of sightings reported during the breeding season, it is just possible that a successful breeding attempt went undetected.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County,

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

*Ad hoc* monitoring only, but sightings from June to September suggest 8 confirmed breeding sites, and 5, probably 10, possible sites.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

The Hobby attracts only casual reports and there is no specific monitoring. Since the first case of breeding in the modern era was confirmed by the Durham Bird Club in the eastern lowlands in 2009, further evidence has only rarely been detected, although it is generally thought to be a very rare and elusive breeder in most years. There was a modest number of reports from the lowlands in 2020 by DBC members, suggesting that the species is still not consolidating its tenuous toehold as a breeding bird in the county.

The first report was on the coast on 7th May, and the last was over a central Durham water on 1st September.

In the uplands, Hobbies seem to show a preference for hunting over high ground watersheds where updrafts probably cause the prey item, (Northern Eggar moths), to be on the wing. A single Hobby was seen hunting insects over heather moorland at 580m a.s.l on 14th May. At another location in similar habitat at 540m asl, a pair of Hobbies hunted together on 15th June, with a single bird seen there one week later.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

One nest found by chance in the SW of the county fledged two chicks, which were ringed by the PDRMG.

On the mosslands the number of occasions when birds were seen, (40), plus seven sightings of two birds, and two of three birds, including a juvenile on 30th August, strongly suggests breeding despite the nest not being found. Breeding has been proved here in the past.

An assessment of sightings during the breeding period, (July-August), concluded that breeding probably occurred at 7 further sites.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

Encounters of single birds hunting the open heather moors for moths are becoming increasingly regular in one particular study area in the county, especially in and around Merlin sites. Another member of the group also encountered a single bird still in the area a few days later. We also received a solid report of a bird alarm calling in late August, and although no breeding attempt could be confirmed. This, along with our young pair from a previous year, makes us optimistic for a breeding attempt in the near future.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

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:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

Hobbies are studied in several counties by PDRMG:

One young fledged from one nest in Cheshire; (four active nests located, one nest monitored to known outcome).

Two young fledged from a nest in Greater Manchester.

Seven young fledged from three nests in North Yorkshire.

16 young fledged from eight nests in South Yorkshire; (in addition, one site had a bird carrying prey, but the breeding site was never located).  
 14 young fledged from five nests in West Yorkshire; (in addition, one nest failed).

**South Peak Raptor Study Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

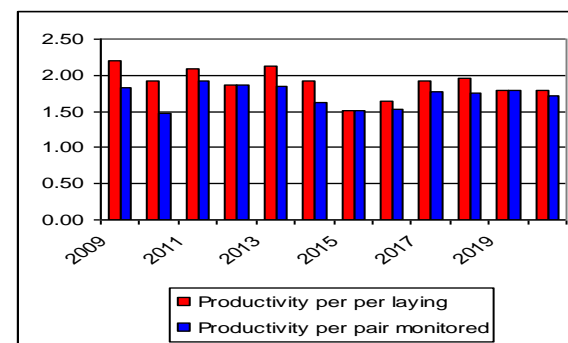
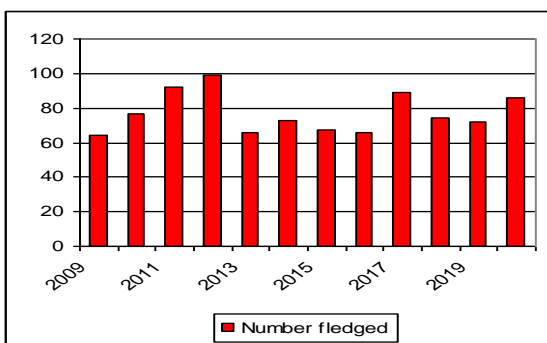
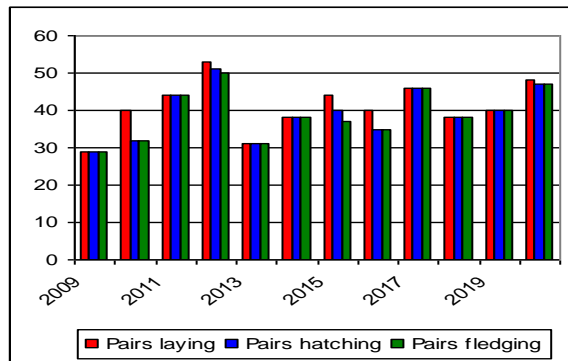
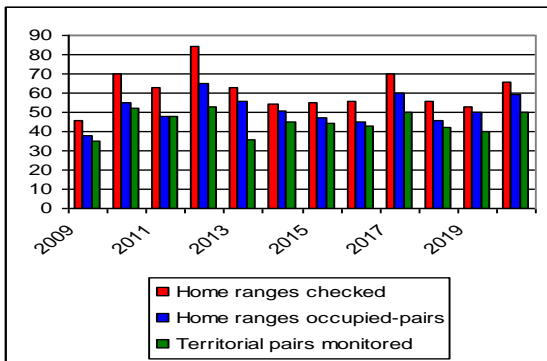
In Ant Messenger’s Southern Derbyshire study area, 22 of 23 sites occupied were successful fledging at least 39 young; (1.77 young per successful pair, 1.70 young per breeding pair). Of these sites, the six pairs in his main 10k square study area were all successful fledging a total of 12 young; (2.00 young per breeding/successful pair), all of which were ringed.

In NE Derbyshire, where Covid-19 had some impact on coverage, 9 sites were reported occupied. At one site, breeding was not proven; at a second site the pair failed; at a third site successful breeding was suspected but proven. At the 6 other sites, all were successful, but the numbers fledged is unknown. (N.B. These are recorded as one young fledged per pair in the table).

**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 2009-20**



## 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.* 2018. The breeding population of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* in the United Kingdom, Isle of Man and Channel Islands in 2014. (*Bird Study* 65:1-19). 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 (due to Covid-19 this species could not be covered in the 2020 Report). RBBP, in its 2019 report, gives a figure of 823-1110 pairs. (Eaton, M. *et al.* 2021. *British Birds* 114:646-704)

### 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 in 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
BRSR	20	4	1	0	4	4	4	4	11	2.75	2.75
CaRSG	7	4	3	1	3	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
ChRSG	12	10	1	0	10	10	10	9	23	2.30	2.30
DUBSG	16	7	1	3	4	4	3	3	6	1.50	1.50
MRG	21	19	1	6	13	13	12	12	30	2.31	2.31
NRG	32	13	1	0	13	13	13	13	27	2.07	2.07
NYMMSG	4	3	0	0	1	3	3	3	4	1.33	4.00
PDRMG	21	8	NC	3	5	5	5	5	13	2.60	2.60
SPRSG	36	33	1	1	28	26	24	24	49	1.88	1.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>2.04</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

2020 was slightly better for this species in Bowland than 2019, with 4 confirmed successful nests compared to 3 in 2019. A report of a 5th nest on a private grouse shooting estate was also published later in the year. This would be the first successful peregrine nest on a private estate in Bowland since 2011.

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 in Bowland.

Two peregrines have been seen in the winter of 2020/21 with damaged feathers on single wings.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

The plight of Peregrine Falcons in Calderdale has been a cause of concern for the group for several years and 2020 was no exception. Traditionally Calderdale held 6 pairs distributed across the 2 principal valleys that dissect the Pennines, running west to east. Only 2 of those 6 traditional sites were occupied in the pre-breeding season. At one site the pair abandoned before attempting to breed for no obvious reason. At the other traditional site the pair was present throughout the season but did not breed.

Two other pairs took up residency in Halifax and Brighouse town centres. Unfortunately; the resident adult male in Brighouse town centre was shot and killed. The incident was reported to the Police: however, the case remains undetected. The Halifax pair was successful, raising 2 young.

Whilst it is encouraging to see breeding Peregrines in urban areas the loss of upland breeding birds is troubling.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

There were additional sightings throughout the year at the Dee and Mersey Estuary; birds were recorded hunting in all months.

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

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The comments below and the data presented in the table refer to the whole of County Durham but exclude 1-2 probable breeding pairs to be found on the north side of Teesmouth.

Covid travel and access restrictions between mid-March and mid-May meant occupancy at some sites and any early breeding attempts which might then have failed will have gone undetected. The final breeding outcomes for the season were otherwise probably accurately assessed.

A pair was present at one upland site within the North Pennine SPA but failed to breed, whilst single birds were reported at 3 separate upland locations in February or early March without any subsequent evidence of breeding.

In the eastern lowlands pairs were present throughout the breeding season at 6 sites and one other site produced repeated reports of only a single bird. Eggs were laid at just 4 sites with one nest failing at egg stage for unknown reasons. Three pairs successfully fledged 3, 2 and one young.

The absence of breeding at any traditional upland site is sadly a consistent feature. The small but welcome increase in breeding at lowland sites, apparent from the first decade of the present century, has now faltered with a decrease in successful pairs and average fledged

young. The combined picture for the county is one of continuing concern for the species' status.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 2

One pair failed to hatch eggs at a climbing quarry site which is very vulnerable, and it was thought the eggs were stolen, but intensive monitoring in 2021 has suggested natural causes. At another mill site where demolition was taking place, a pair including a 1st year female took up a territory from 1st April despite the disturbance, but did not breed, and stayed into 2021.

Brood sizes were lower this year with 4 nests having some unhatched eggs. Four newly-fledged juveniles (from 4 different sites) were known to have died shortly after fledging. At Rochdale Town Hall, a new pair consisting of a first-summer female and an older male, successfully hatched 2 eggs at 37 and 38 days, the male doing much of the incubation. However, once she saw chicks, the female fed them normally.

At another site the 3 eggs were pure white and 2 hatched - unlike 2019 when the eggs were also white and eventually disappeared - the possibility of substitution was considered then, but obviously this female is just laying aberrant -coloured eggs.

The only new nest site in 2020 was Manchester Town Hall, where the 2 year old male (from Leigh Spinners Mill) bred with an unringed female in a recess behind a quatrefoil window, However, due to urgent repair work lasting until 2023, all 4 quatrefoils have had to be boarded up in 2021.

Due to Covid-19, 2 sites with resident pairs could not be monitored, although it was known that pairs were present.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

The Northumbrian Peregrine population in 2020, although still in decline, had a excellent breeding season.

Over the last few years the population has struggled, the main problem being that adult birds are holding the nesting territories, but not laying eggs, some not even making scrapes!

In 2020 some home ranges were checked later than normal because of the Covid restrictions , so it is possible that some of these sites had failed before the first visit was able to be made, and therefore thought not occupied .

2020 had 13 known pairs (14 in 2019) all of which laid eggs, but there was a massive increase in the breeding performance, with 27 chicks fledged (only 8 chicks in 2019).

The successful nests were spread over the whole county, although in one study area -an area which has historically suffered for human disturbance - had its best year in a decade. Here, the number of chicks raised went from its usual near-zero to a incredible 15 chicks fledged!

In the Border Forest Kielder, one nest was found to have failed, for what must be a unique reason in the UK. A visit to check the nest contents found 2 chicks 7 days old, both of which were dead and had full crops, whilst another chick was alive and 16 days old. The nest ledge had lots of fresh goat droppings and it was thought that the two youngest chicks had been stepped on by a goat and died. But the story continues - about 2 days after the visit we had a

very strong westerly gale. This nest ledge is very exposed and the last chick was blown off and died - a sad ending to this nesting attempt.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

The 2 inland sites regularly monitored were not checked this season due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Late season visits to 2 of the known coastal sites confirmed successful breeding, however, with only a single fledgling recorded at each location. The pair that bred successfully at the quarry site to the south of the study area in 2019, not occupied this season, was presumed to be the pair that fledged 2 young at another quarry a few miles to the north. Sightings of hunting birds were recorded outside the breeding season at the usual localities, e.g. 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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

Eight pairs of birds were recorded occupying territories pre-breeding. Four of these pairs were recorded as settled, and went on to breed successfully fledging 13 young. Elsewhere, 5 pairs in Derbyshire fledged 10 young and one pair in Greater Manchester fledged 3 young.

There are several historic sites within the study area where birds are repeatedly failing to breed successfully despite sites being occupied each year.

PDRMG colour-ring Peregrine Falcons as part of a BTO project and we have started to see some results from this project in 2020 with 2 colour-ringed birds being reported holding territory away from our study area.

PDRMG monitor and ring birds in several urban locations but Covid-19 restrictions did not allow for any nest visits. However, although some were viewable online via webcam, so known to be successful, they are not included in this data.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 1

Three of 4 urban sites were successful, fledging 10 young. In the Upper Derwent, 2 pairs nested successfully, fledging 4 young. In the NE Derbyshire lowlands 2 pairs fledged 5 young and an immature pair was assumed to have failed. In the White Peak 23 pairs were present, 5 on natural crags, the rest in quarries. Seventeen sites were successful, with a minimum of 39 young fledged. The outcome was unknown at a further 4 sites. Two sites failed due to robbery of eggs or young. A third site was also robbed, though the pair went on to re-lay and fledge 3 young. The RSPB and Derbyshire Rural Crime Team were involved, and a man was arrested and charged - and is due in court in summer 2021.

In May, raptor workers assisted Derbyshire Police locating a dead Peregrine Falcon in the Upper Derwent Valley area. The dead bird had been reported to the Police and also posted on social media. Evidence at the scene suggested poisoning as the cause of death and Derbyshire Police submitted the bird to the UK Government's Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme for testing. In February 2021, updated data posted on the government WIIS scheme website,



contained details of all incidents recorded in 2020 including this Peregrine; the cause of death was confirmed as poisoning with Bendiocarb and stated that that it was a case of abuse. In May and June, three Peregrines were found dead in Staffordshire, at separate locations. The WIIS scheme website confirmed the causes of death were all poisoning by Bendiocarb abuse.

A further persecution event recorded was an adult bird shot in Belper in March, which subsequently died.

### NERF regional summary

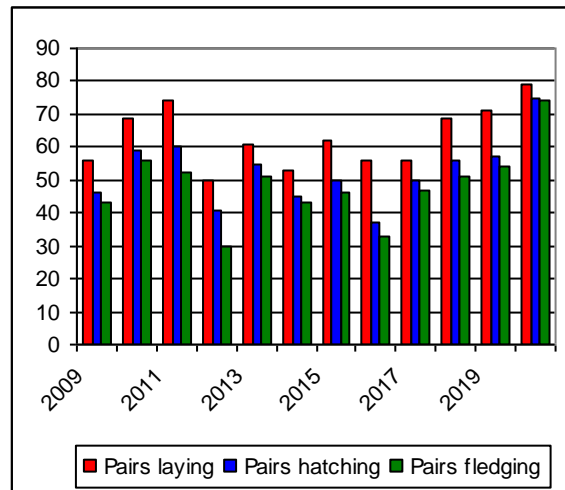
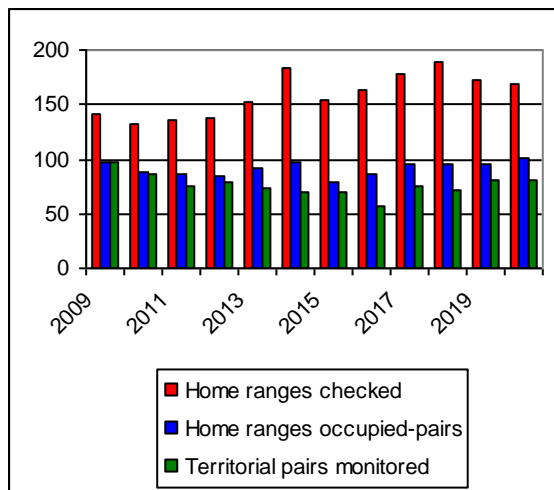
There was a gratifying increase of nearly 30% in the number of fledged young in 2020, compared with 2019. This was despite the absence of figures from the Yorkshire Dales National Park (13 in 2019). There were notable increases in the South Peak RSG area (49 compared with 36 in 2019), Cheshire RSG (23 compared with 5 in 2019) and Northumbria RG (27 compared with 8 in 2019), offsetting smaller declines in the Peak District RMG, Calderdale RSG and Durham Upland Bird Study Group areas. Productivity was generally greater, too, which helped this increase, particularly in Northumberland. Whilst there appears to be the first signs of a decline in persecution, we cannot be complacent, as the events in the South Peak and Calderdale illustrate.

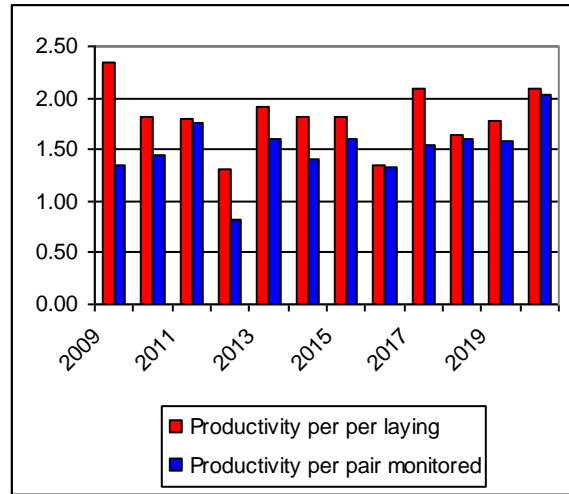
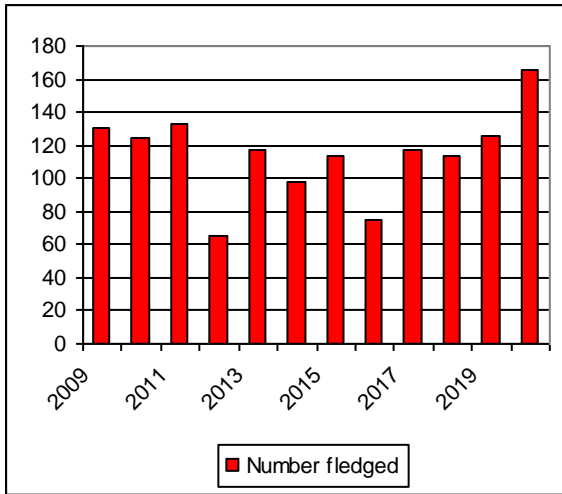
Urban sites where cameras have been installed continue to attract much public interest and provide opportunities for excellent PR which can only be beneficial for this species.

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](http://www.mineralproducts.org/cont_members01.htm)

### Comparative data 2009-2020





## Common Raven *Corvus corax*



Mike Price

### UK population estimate

In 2016 the summer population was estimated at 10000 pairs in the UK. (Woodward, I. *et al.* APEP 4. *British Birds* 113:69-104).

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.

Covid-19 restrictions meant that this species could not be assessed for the BBS in 2020.

### 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	3	0	0	3	3	3	3	3	1.00*	1.00*
CaRSG	5	3	0	20	3	2	2	2	8	4.00	2.67
ChRSG	10	10	2	0	9	9	9	9	21	2.33	2.33
DUBSG	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
MRG	27	12	NC	NC	10	10	9	9	27	2.70	2.70
NRG	32	22	0	3	17	17	16	15	37	2.18	2.18
NYMUBSG	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PDRSG	16	16	NC	3	13	13	10	9	31	2.38	2.38
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>2.35</b>	<b>2.31</b>

## Group Reports

### Bowland Raptor Study Group

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

The number of breeding pairs seems to be slowly increasing, with three pairs known to have successfully fledged chicks in one part of the study area. Although the exact number of young fledging from each nest is unknown the group has estimated a minimum of 1 per nest and this is reflected in the table.

This species is still absent as a breeding bird from large parts of the study area, a likely result of illegal persecution linked to game bird management.

A large roost containing over 70 birds occurred in the study area during winter.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

The number of sightings of Ravens 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. Unfortunately; this increase was not repeated in 2020, however the Group believes that this reduction in sightings was largely the result of limited observer effort due to the Covid travel restrictions.

The 5 traditional sites were checked prior to the first lockdown period starting. Initially all 5 were occupied by pairs; however, 2 pairs didn't settle and quickly abandoned any potential breeding attempt.

The 3 remaining pairs were monitored; 2 of which were known to fledge a total of 8 young.

### **Cheshire Raptor Study Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 3

Increasing in numbers, large flocks of birds are being increasingly reported from lowland farmland in both autumn and winter.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Albeit that evidence of any breeding attempts would be expected to be a very rare event, the travel and access restrictions in springtime due to Covid prevented almost all site monitoring during this critical period. One pair lingered at a site during February but there was no subsequent evidence of breeding here or indeed elsewhere. Groups of 2-6 birds were seen at a variety of upland locations during the first winter period and from autumn onwards.

Odd birds were reported during the summer months. Ravens seem to enter the county annually in autumn from the neighbouring Cumbria and Northumberland populations but have consistently failed to establish a breeding nucleus in our own county. The persistent absence of successful breeding is one of the most stark gaps in the county's avifauna and with a range of suitable habitats illegal persecution must be a significant factor.

### **Manchester Raptor Group**

**Extent of coverage:** Whole County.

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

**Covid impact score:** 1

An analysis of over 200 records only produced 5 known nests of which one failed at egg stage, plus 2 more regular sites where nest building was observed. Family parties in likely areas accounted for a further 5. Breeding was considered possible at 15 sites where birds were present in the breeding season.

### **Northumbria Ringing Group**

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

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

**Covid impact score:** 4

Raven is an early nester and was the species most affected by the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020. Consequently most group members were prevented from going out, and by the time the restrictions were lifted the majority of the young had fledged.

Full coverage was only achieved in the Border Forest, Kielder with both the North and South Cheviots reporting less monitoring than usual. Even with the restrictions a total of 22 nests were located, of which 17 laid eggs and 15 nests fledged 37 chicks.

Ravens are now being seen in small numbers on the coast in north Northumberland where a pair had established a new nesting territory over the last few years. In 2020 the pair built a nest but the outcome is unknown.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Very meagre data was obtained during 2020. The one known former nest site at Ravenscar was checked, only the once, and determined to be not occupied. Isolated observations were received from the north of the moors: a single bird calling on Rosedale Moor on 2nd March and a pair flew over Houlsyke on 25th March. Additionally, on 15th April a lone bird was recorded near Battersby Moor on the western edge of the National Park.

Many of the usual raptor species that normally receive at least some fieldwork effort from Group members suffered from lockdown restrictions and Raven was no exception.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 2

There is a large area of unoccupied suitable habitat in the study area; consequently, breeding Ravens appear to be seriously under-represented in the PDRMG study area. Sixteen sites were found to be occupied; 9 of those pairs were successful, collectively fledging 31 young. Local birders observing a nest site at Adgen Rocher in the NE of the study area, reported the disappearance of the adults at an active nest, this resulted in the young starving to death.

### **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.

**Covid impact score:** 3

Due to both time and Covid-related constraints, monitoring of Raven was significantly reduced compared to previous years. Where pairs were located or known of, outcomes were often unknown due to lockdown. In South Derbyshire, sightings of family parties suggested Raven had a reasonable year here. In the White Peak, most quarries held pairs early in the season - some of these were known to have produced 3 or 4 young.

## **NERF regional summary**

The Covid 19 pandemic certainly impacted on the ability of some of our members to monitor Raven throughout the season. The early nesting habit of Raven did enable some monitoring prior to the first lockdown being imposed on 23rd March.

Raptor workers in the NERF Study Area have long known that Raven populations have been suppressed year upon year in the northern uplands and 2020 was no exception. Examination of the summary of the table above reveals the true picture. Of the 127 young fledging in 2020, 116 were produced in 4 Raptor Study areas, the Dark Peak, Cheshire, Manchester and Northumberland. Collectively all of the other NERF Study Group areas who submitted data only produced 11 chicks, which was a very disappointing outcome.

Despite large tracts of eminently suitable habitat in County Durham, geographical area 2576 km<sup>2</sup> [990 square miles], and on the North York Moors, geographical area 1136 km<sup>2</sup> [554 square miles], in common with previous years both of these areas have failed to produce any breeding birds. It is inconceivable that a combined land mass of 4012 km<sup>2</sup> [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 usual 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 unfavourable weather conditions and in some locations 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 persecution, which is related to land use. The problem is particularly acute in both the Durham and the North York Moors study areas.

The NERF 12-years 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 1415 fledglings, however the average productivity remains stubbornly at 117.92 per year. Raven 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. As in previous years it is very clear 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 to occupy eminently suitable territories. 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 many are systematically killed illegally.

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
2020	97	67	2	27	55	54	49	47	127	2.35	2.31
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1371</b>	<b>951</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>1415</b>	<b>2.35</b>	<b>2.12</b>
<b>Av. / year</b>	<b>114.25</b>	<b>79.25</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>11.92</b>	<b>55.42</b>	<b>50.08</b>	<b>47.17</b>	<b>43.66</b>	<b>117.92</b>	<b>2.42</b>	<b>2.20</b>

### 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. When doing so please ask for a Police 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 the majority of 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 with the skin. Cover both the bird and the bait with vegetation and contact the authorities as soon as possible.

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## **A Summary of Raptor Monitoring in the Washburn Valley, Southern Nidderdale AONB and adjacent areas in Yorkshire during 2020.**

The Washburn Valley, the southern section of the Nidderdale AONB, Ilkley Moor and nearby moors are currently monitored by a loose consortium of raptor workers and bird watchers, some of whom were members of the former 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, collated as a result of informal observations.

Whilst the data collected does not follow the standardised NERF format it does give an overview of some species that occupy land on the eastern fringe of the Yorkshire Pennines. Regrettably North Yorkshire has, for many years, had the dubious 'honour' of being the English County with the highest recorded level of raptor persecution. In an attempt to ensure that the situation is not exacerbated further the locations of the nests monitored by the Washburn Group have been anonymised, recorded only by zone, in this report. However, the complete dataset is held on a centralised confidential database and is available for comparative studies by both the Washburn Group and NERF.

Travel restrictions imposed by the Government in an attempt to control spread of the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the Group's ability to monitor raptors during the breeding season. Consequently, this record is an under representation of the actual population levels within the study area.

### **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 the definitive list of occupied sites. The study area is extensive and is monitored by limited resources; consequently it is not unreasonable to assume that additional pairs went undetected. Nonetheless the Group recorded 13 confirmed breeding pairs in 6 distinct areas and believe that the area contained several additional pairs.

### **Merlin**

The Group only recorded one sighting in the Nidderdale AONB during 2020 when a male was observed displaying. Unfortunately due to the 'Covid lockdown' no further visits were made to the area and the outcome is unknown.

### **Goshawk**

During 2020 there were records from 5 distinct sectors within the study area. Three areas contained pairs; however the outcomes at these sites are unknown. Two of the areas held single birds; in one a bird was seen displaying in February and March. In the other woodland a single bird was noted on passage in autumn.

### **Osprey**

A minimum of 2 birds were monitored at one reservoir site from 1st May for several weeks. However, there is no evidence that they attempted to breed.



## Honey Buzzard

There were reports of single birds being observed in separate 2 areas of woodland during 2020. The first was recorded on 31st May and the second was observed almost one month later on 25th June.

## Red Kite

Red Kite is a fairly common species within the study area. Eleven pairs were located, 5 of which were in one block of woodland. One pair was recorded feeding young; but the number of chicks fledging from the nest is unknown.

## Sparrowhawk

During 2020 3 pairs were recorded in 3 separate blocks of woodland. Collectively they fledged a minimum of 7 young.

## Hobby

Two plantations held single birds which were seen on numerous occasions.

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

## **A Summary of Raptor Monitoring in Shropshire during 2020** **Leo Smith**

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 monitoring work since 2010 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 independent groups were well established before the formation of the Raptor Group. 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](http://www.shropshirebirds.com)

[www.shropshirebirds.com/index/bird-conservation/the-shropshire-raptor-study-group/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/index/bird-conservation/the-shropshire-raptor-study-group/)

[www.shropshirebarnowlgrou.org.uk/](http://www.shropshirebarnowlgrou.org.uk/)

[www.shropshireperegrines.co.uk/](http://www.shropshireperegrines.co.uk/)

## Raptor Group results 2020

The status of the target species, and the monitoring results in 2020 are summarised below, and in the table.

Covid-19 lockdown restrictions limited fieldwork for early-season nest finding, so fewer pairs were found than usual, and no ringing, colour-ringing or wing-tagging was undertaken as a result of BTO policy.

## Goshawk

The population was estimated at 31-50 breeding pairs in 2014, but has increased since. South-west Shropshire is a national stronghold, but the species is spreading, and another successful nest was found in the northern half of the County. However, some breeding sites have been lost, because the maturing conifers in Forestry Commission and other plantations have been felled and harvested.

## Hobby

In 2014, the population was estimated “to exceed 70 breeding pairs in good years”, but it is unlikely this number has been reached since. The number found annually fluctuates considerably.

Twenty-nine sites were checked where breeding Hobbies have been found in previous years, but not as thoroughly as usual, while 25 sites were not checked at all. Only 3 breeding pairs were found. Two nests, both at new sites, were located, producing 3 fledged young. In addition, one recently fledged young was found at another new site, but not the nest it was from, making 4 fledged young in total. All these nests were in the south-east.

## Merlin

There has been one traditional breeding site, with one, occasionally 2, pairs found there between 2010 and 2017, but none have been found since then, in spite of thorough searches.

## Red Kite

Monitoring is carried out jointly with the Welsh Kite Trust. Thirty nests were found or reported by local residents, 7 less than last year but still more than the previous highest total (28 in 2017). Seven were at new sites. Six further pairs were located or reported.

Only 5 of the nests failed, and 22 are known to have been successful (one less than last year, the highest annual successful number to date). Assuming that all large chicks in the nests survived, at least 45 young fledged from them (higher than all previous years, the best being 2011, when 36 fledged).

Another 44 sites used in previous years were checked, but no Kites were found there. This included 12 sites that had a nest in 2019. Two sites with a nest in 2019 were not revisited. The population increase and expansion of range has continued since the first known successful breeding, as recently as 2006. Kites have spread rapidly from the south-west, and might be found breeding anywhere now.

## 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, and chicks in 5 nests (mostly in boxes) were colour-ringed, and a further 6 nests were found (outcome unknown).

Progress was limited in 2020, but 7 nests were found, and breeding was confirmed for another 4 pairs.

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*.

**Table 1. Summary of Shropshire Raptor Study Group results 2020**

Species	Previously occupied sites checked	Territories		Outcome			
		Nests found	Additional pairs	Successful	Failed	Unknown	Fledged young (minimum)
Goshawk	40+	18	5	16	2	0	33
Hobby	40+	7	8	8*	2	0	13
Merlin	1	0					
Red Kite	70+	30	6	22	5	3	45

\* Includes 3 nests not found which produced 4 of the fledged young

The low failure rate is attributed largely to warm dry weather in May and June.

### Peregrine

(Shropshire Peregrine Group results)

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, and 22 in 2019 is the highest yet.

In 2020, 21 sites were monitored, and a further site was confirmed in 2021 which fledged 2 young in 2020. The total number of known breeding attempts thus equalled the 2019 total, and 18 sites (85%) were successful, producing a total of 46 fledged young. Two regular sites were not accessible, so the total number of sites probably exceeded 22, and the fledged young may have been over 50. This exceeds the previous record of 43 chicks in 2011.

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 (around 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 2020, SBOG monitored 195 nest boxes and natural sites. Breeding (at least one egg laid) occurred in 69 (35.3%) of the sites. One-hundred and thirty-nine chicks were successfully produced in 55 (28.2%) of the sites, an average of 2.5 chicks. An additional 14 sites held a single adult or non-breeding pair. Broods ranged from one to 4 chicks. No second broods were recorded, which is typical in vole "trough" years. Ten new pairs were recorded.

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

### **Other Raptors in Shropshire**

(Taken from the Shropshire Bird Report 2020 (*in prep*)).

### **Common Buzzard, Raven, Sparrowhawk**

These species are not systematically monitored. No information was received in 2020 suggesting any change in their numbers or distribution.

### **Marsh Harrier**

All 18 records were of single passage birds, and probably relate to at least 9 individuals. This is more or less the same as 2019, but substantially more than in previous years, reflecting the increase in the national population, particularly sites in Lancashire and Merseyside.

### **Hen Harrier**

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor, with 21 records from 7 sites, all of single birds, with at least 3 and perhaps as many as 6 individuals, rather fewer than in 2019. Whixall Moss is the most frequented site. Most records are believed to involve birds from the breeding population in north Wales, and the recent reduction in numbers here probably reflects a decline in the Welsh population.

### **Montagu's Harrier**

An adult male was photographed for the third spring in 4 years on the Long Mynd on 14th May. All were seen on a single May day only but the likelihood of the three sightings all referring to one individual seems high.

### **Honey Buzzard**

There was one record of this rare passage migrant, flying over Market Drayton on 25th May.

### **Osprey**

Rare passage migrant, with most records from the Severn Valley. There were probably 11 individuals in 2020, 6 on spring migration in late March or early April, one in June was probably a prospecting immature returning to the UK for the first time, while 4 in August-early September were presumably heading south on autumn passage.

### **Long-eared Owl**

Rare resident, but very elusive and status poorly understood. No records in 2020.

## Short-eared Owl

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant, mainly transient individual birds and tending to become increasingly scarce, although 15 records spanning 6 months of the year was a big increase compared with 2019. No evidence of breeding.

*Leo Smith*  
Convenor  
Shropshire Raptor Study Group  
[leo@leosmith.org.uk](mailto:leo@leosmith.org.uk)

## RARER SPECIES MONITORED BY NERF Occurrences in 2020

### Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*

It's doubtful if there are any readers of this Review who are unaware of the long-staying Bearded Vulture in the Peak District in 2020. First sighted over Kenilworth 25th June, it made its way north through the southern Peak District, settling first around Derwent Edge throughout July and then, more reliably for its many admirers, around Crowden in the north. An authoritative article was published in *British Birds* (Phipps, Louis, Loercher, Franziska, Ball, David and Marle, Etienne. 2021. Genetic analysis reveals the origin of a Bearded Vulture in northern Europe in summer 2020. *British Birds* 114: 27-37), and Birdguides also published an article (Viles, Sam. 2020. Bearded Vulture: historic vagrancy and current European status. [www.birdguides.com/articles/bearded-vulture-historic-vagrancy-and-current-european-status](http://www.birdguides.com/articles/bearded-vulture-historic-vagrancy-and-current-european-status)) available online. Feather analysis determined that this 2cy female fledged from the Bargy Massif in the Haute-Savoie area of the French Alps, the offspring of a wild-hatched male and a captive-bred female released as a fledgling in 2006. She left the Peak District on 19th September and was tracked moving south through several counties, reaching Beachy Head in Sussex 14th October and departing across the Channel on 15th.

### Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

After the Golden Eagle excitement of 2019 there were high hopes in Northumberland for 2020, and returning birds from the South of Scotland Project, but with the birds now becoming more mature, we only had a visit from one eagle - but it was no surprise. "Beaky" C11 returned for her third year in the county

Unlike 2019, when she summered, this year her visits were much shorter.

Her first visit was in March, when she flew along the Northumberland/Cumbria Border into the North Pennines before returning to Scotland, The next was April 7th-8th in the Border Forest area, followed by a day visit on the 29th, before moving north into the Cheviots from May 1st-5th. The last visit of the year was again in the Border Forest area, where she spent August 22nd-27th.

Many thanks go to Dr Catherine Barlow, Project Manager, South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, for the satellite data.

### Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

Occasional winter reports from the Peak District in 2020.

A late bird was filmed briefly at Grosmont in the North York Moors on 15th May – the only known record for the year.

See below for accounts of White-tailed Eagle.

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## White-tailed Eagles in the North York Moors *Tim Mackrill*



*Simon Elliot*

A White-tailed Eagle passing overhead with slow, laboured strokes of its vast wings is always a memorable sight. In the UK our largest bird of prey is synonymous with northwest Scotland, but with the onset of the Isle of Wight reintroduction project it is a species that raptor workers in northern England may become increasingly familiar with in the coming years.

Historical research indicates that White-tailed Eagles were once common across the whole of England with the population estimated to be as high as 1000-1400 pairs in 500 CE. But like many birds of prey, and particularly those with a penchant for fish, they were relentlessly persecuted from the Middle Ages onwards and the population went into terminal decline. The last pair in southern England bred on Culver Cliff on the Isle of Wight in 1780, and they were slowly eradicated from the rest of the UK during the next century.

Following the successful reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles to Scotland - where there are now approximately 150 breeding pairs - the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation and Forestry England embarked on a five-year project to restore this iconic species to the estuaries of southern England. The first six birds were translocated from nests in the northwest Scotland stronghold and released on the Isle of Wight in August 2019, with each individual fitted with

a satellite transmitter to enable post-release movements to be monitored in detail. A further seven birds followed in 2020.

White-tailed Eagles tend to breed for the first time at four-five years, usually close to their natal site. However, wing-tagging and satellite tracking studies have shown that young birds can be extremely nomadic in their early years, sometimes dispersing considerable distances and spending one-three years away. As such there is a chance of individuals from the Isle of Wight turning-up just about anywhere in England during their early explorations, and this proved to be the case in spring 2020.

The satellite tracking data revealed that the Isle of Wight birds were extremely sedentary during their first winter, usually living in an area of just a few square kilometres and spending upwards of 90% of diurnal time perched inconspicuously on the edge of a wood or perhaps a post in an estuary. But then, as the days began to lengthen, their behaviour changed. In March 2020, just as our own movements were severely restricted by the first Covid-19 lockdown, the young eagles became extremely mobile. Longer sunny days encouraged them to begin dispersing away from areas they had favoured during winter. On 4th April two birds, male G393 - who had wintered in Oxfordshire - and female G318 - who had been extremely sedentary on the Isle of Wight since release - were encouraged north by warm southerly winds. The two birds roosted separately in north Lincolnshire that night; G393 having flown north from Rutland Water, and G318 after covering an impressive 263 km (163 miles) from Berkshire. The next day they both resumed their travels and, after crossing the Humber independently, they met up and flew north together for 17 kilometres (11 miles) en route to the North York Moors.

After arriving in the North York Moors, both birds were fairly mobile, and on 7th April they flew to the coast together, spending four hours between Whitby and Saltburn-by-Sea. Both eventually returned inland and that evening G318 settled in an area in the north-west of the National Park that had been frequented by a wintering White-tailed Eagle the previous November. G393, meanwhile remained more nomadic and on 12th April flew 174 km (108 miles) to Macclesfield Forest in Cheshire. The young male continued to explore extensively over the course of the next week, ranging through the East Midlands and then East Anglia. He headed north again on 19th April, flying 188 km (117 miles) from South Lincolnshire to the northern Peak District, skirting the Manchester Raptor Group area at Hollingworth, near Hyde, between 1649 and 1733 then turning east into the Huddersfield area having now travelled more than 1650 km (1025) miles over the course of a month. He subsequently lingered in the northern Peak District for a week before returning to the North York Moors.



After their springtime explorations, the behaviour of the two eagles changed markedly during May, as they began their first moult. G393 settled in a well-wooded valley in the centre of the North York Moors, living predominantly in an area of just 2km<sup>2</sup> where rabbits were abundant. G318, meanwhile continued to favour two areas a few kilometres to the north, preferring to perch inconspicuously on the edges of plantations and making only occasional forays out onto the open moors. The one exception was on 6th May when she made a 137 km (85 miles) flight south past Scarborough and into East Riding, before returning north to her favoured areas again.

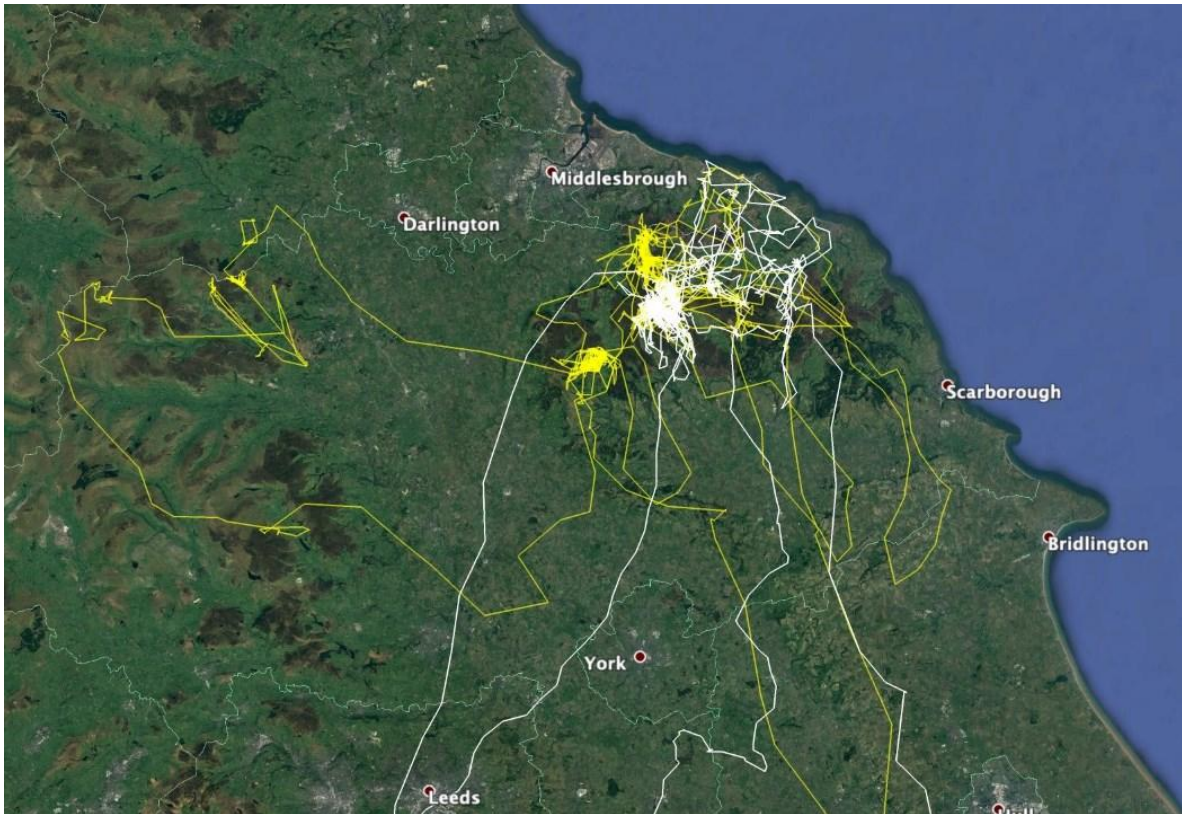
On 27th May G393 was also more mobile than unusual, and this almost certainly caught the attention of G318 because the female arrived in the neighbouring valley at 1130 that day. She subsequently joined G393 in his favoured patch, and the two birds spent the rest of May and most of June together. During this period we received several reports of the birds catching Rabbits, and it was clear that this was the key prey item. The satellite data also revealed that the birds roosted together regularly.

From 8th July G393's behaviour changed and he became more mobile again, visiting the coast at East Row on 11th July. He made another flight to the coast on 19th July, this time to Runswick Bay, before heading purposefully south. By 16:35 he had flown 105 km (65 miles) and stopped beside the River Derwent near Ellerton. Next morning G393 continued south through Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire and then into north-east Leicestershire. He subsequently spent the autumn and early winter in West Norfolk.

G318 also became more mobile during July, flying a 94 km (58 mile) loop to the south on 17th July. With G393 heading south, she moved to a neighbouring valley in late July and continued to live a more nomadic lifestyle during August, spending a night near the coast at Staithes on 7th August and then visiting Scaling Dam reservoir the next day. She returned to the areas she had frequented earlier in the spring, but was now much less settled. She spent two weeks in the south-west of the North York Moors during the latter half of August, where she again favoured the lower grass slopes, where Rabbits were the key prey item.

On 31st August, after five months in the North York Moors, G318 flew 88 km (55 miles) west to the Yorkshire Dales. She spent the next two weeks visiting various locations before returning to the North York Moors on 13th September. She lingered in the south west of the National Park until 25th September, when she headed south to the Lincolnshire Wolds, where she subsequently spent the winter.





Yellow – G318

White – G393

By the time G318 flew south, one or both of the Isle of Wight birds had been present in North Yorkshire for almost six months. During this period the satellite data had provided a fascinating insight into their daily movements, but our knowledge of how they were living in the landscape was greatly enhanced by sightings received from members of NERF. It was particularly valuable to receive sightings of the birds with prey, which almost invariably were Rabbits. The two most notable findings gleaned from a combination of satellite tracking data and field observations were that the birds were usually very inconspicuous in the landscape, spending over 90% of diurnal time perched, usually on the edge of a plantation or in wooded valleys. Secondly, their movements were strongly influenced by the abundance of Rabbits. Rabbits are vulnerable to the White-tailed Eagles' preference for the sit and watch method of catching prey, and this explains why the birds generally favoured lower slopes, rather than the open moor. The areas where the birds lingered for any significant length of time, always supported Rabbits in good numbers.

As expected both G393 and G318 have now returned to the South Coast, but it is very likely that other dispersing immature White-tailed Eagles from the Isle of Wight will venture into the NERF region in the coming years. Very many thanks to those who submitted sightings, and also to Steve Downing for coordinating fieldwork efforts on our behalf.

For the latest news on the White-tailed Eagle project please visit [www.roydennis.org](http://www.roydennis.org).

*Dr Tim Mackrill is an Ornithologist for the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation and coordinates the Foundation's work in England.*

## Part 2 – Raptor Workers provide surveillance security for WTEs on the North York Moors.

*Wilf Norman*

Soon after the start of the first national full lockdown period two satellite-tagged juvenile White-tailed Eagles of Isle of Wight re-introduction stock arrived in the NYMs on 5<sup>th</sup> April. This information was notified to Steve Downing and subsequently two-hour satellite registrations of the birds' positions were passed on to him in the hope he could mobilise local fieldworkers to monitor the birds. The eagles concerned were identified as G393 (male) and G318 (female) both birds were part of the 2019 cohort of translocations.

Over the next few days both birds were observed by members of the public, photographed and even phone-filmed by people. NYM gamekeepers seemed to know of their arrival well before those fieldworkers mobilised by Steve to follow up registrations, and no doubt the word was put out to leave the eagles well alone. The keepers were fully aware they were satellite-tagged and one can easily imagine the consternation pervading their ranks should an "accident" befall either one of these high-profile birds whilst in the NP. As a back-up form of insurance towards their welfare, all keepers met with over the time the eagles were in the NYMs were made fully aware that a network of RSG workers was following-up satellite registrations regularly.

Initially, both birds either hung around together or at least remained within distant sight of each other although they sometimes roosted miles apart. Activity over these early days involved ranging mainly over the north-eastern part of the NYMs. Satellite registrations over this period also revealed that one of the birds virtually overflowed the house of the Head Keeper on Goathland Moor! It was extremely vexing that the arrival of these eagles coincided with the early days of the first strict lockdown period. I was the local fieldworker endeavouring to sight the birds soon after their arrival in the park, and stretched the lockdown rules to the limit following up last sightings notified by Steve. Annoyingly, assumptions made as to which direction the birds might have moved during the time-lag period between satellite registration and notification from Steve proved way off the mark each time, and in fact despite my efforts I never managed to make contact with either eagle until May when I connected with G393 in Farndale. What was particularly galling for me was that following one of my failed forays after the birds, both had flown high over the garden of a pal in Aislaby, John McEachen. This was the day the birds took a flight northwards up the coast as far as Saltburn-by-Sea. Both returned to the NYMs the same day. At the time they passed over Aislaby, John was busy on his lounge in the garden working on his tan. Lying on his back he was stunned when two circling eagles, high above, drifted slowly into his field of vision. He had the presence of mind to quickly phone another mutual friend, Graham Oliver, fortunately at home, across the other side of Eskdale and he too was able to see the birds. By the end of the April both had gravitated to central areas of the NP where they spent the majority of the next five months, the period being interspersed with occasional lengthy exploratory flights away from the moors. Reece Fowler, based in Great Ayton to the west, was regularly updated with registrations and often met up with both birds in Kildale and Farndale: he obtained a superb series of photographs of G393 there on 25<sup>th</sup> May, when the bird was attacked persistently by a Buzzard.

It will almost certainly never be known just how many birders, members of the public, and keepers for that matter, eventually saw and probably photographed one or both of these eagles, but the numbers involved must have been considerable and the sightings undoubtedly provided memorable incidents for those that did. Articles appeared in local papers

stimulating interest among the public and remarkably, even some keepers who had the luck to encounter the birds expressed a grudging awe and admiration of them.

Young White-tailed Eagles are known to range widely for the first few years of life so it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that these particular two might well decide to call on the North York Moors again before settling down hopefully to nest where desired in the Islet of Wight area. If they do return they will undoubtedly again generate as much interest and attention as they did in 2020.

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## ~ NERF ROLL OF HONOUR ~

The following have been recognised for their work in raptor conservation

### Bill Murphy and Bill Hesketh

The history of ornithology is littered with explorers who travelled the globe identifying new species, in the days when travel was all but impossible. There are biologists, statisticians,



scientists and all manner of academics who bring both old and new avian information to us almost daily. Our bookshelves groan under the weight of their combined literary output. Whilst we acknowledge and celebrate the work undertaken by this group of ornithologists we must never forget that the academic world of ornithology is under-pinned by a vast network of millions of 'ordinary' birders. For more than a century birders who have collectively spent countless hours, voluntarily surveying and monitoring birds whilst keeping meticulous notes to be shared with the rest of the birding community. A handful of these 'ordinary' birders achieve legendary status amongst their peers and NERF is fortunate enough to have two such legends within its ranks.

The names Bill Hesketh and Bill Murphy are synonymous with monitoring and protecting birds of prey in the Forest of Bowland. It is impossible to overstate the fantastic contribution that they have made to our collective knowledge over five decades. Not only have they collected a vast wealth of data they have touched the lives of all of us who know them.

We all owe them a debt of gratitude and it is with great pleasure that we award the Bills NERF Certificates of Merit.

### James Bray

James worked for the RSPB for six years in the Forest of Bowland, working with a fantastic team of RSPB staff and volunteers, and with United Utilities and their tenants. Up until 2011

the United Utilities estate had usually been the most important site in England for Hen Harriers. That year was followed by several years with no Hen Harriers breeding in Bowland at all.

He left his Bowland post in 2021 with 9 successful Hen Harrier nests on the United Utilities Bowland estate, and the situation almost back to levels that they had been at in the 2000s.

To put that in perspective that is well over a third of the successful nests in England in 2021



being on just the United Utilities Bowland estate. That of course speaks volumes for the situation that Hen Harriers face in the rest of England, but it also speaks volumes for the partnership work that has been done in Bowland over the past 10 years.

He has made some very good friends and learnt a huge amount over the past 6 years, and will miss being in Bowland full time; however in his new post he will be continuing to work for Hen Harriers and other upland wildlife.

NERF is very pleased to award James a Certificate of Appreciation and wish him well in his new career.

### **Trevor Grimshaw**

It is with great pleasure that NERF has awarded a certificate of appreciation to Trevor in recognition of his contribution to studying and protecting birds of prey in the South Peak District for over 3 decades.

Trevor has been a Peregrine enthusiast ever since the species returned to breed in the High Peak of Derbyshire at a traditional site 40 years ago in 1981. The first successful breeding took place in 1984, after two years of occupation when the nest was robbed at egg stage.



He was the Conservation Officer of the Derbyshire Ornithological Society in 1984 and 1985 and organised voluntary round-the-clock nest watches in co-operation with the Sheffield Bird Study Group and the National Trust, which resulted in the successful fledging of three chicks – two females and a male – in 1984 and four chicks in 1985.

The interest in raptors and the growth in population of these iconic species in the following years led to the formation of the South Peak Raptor Study Group, in early

1998 when a dozen or so active raptor field workers got together with the aim of monitoring the breeding performance of the area's speciality birds of prey. Mick Taylor was the original Co-ordinator of the group until 2011, when it was agreed to produce a joint Annual Report with their colleagues in the Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group. Trevor took over the Co-ordinator role from Mick in 2012 and continued to produce their joint report, the Peak District Raptor Report, with contributions from Mike Price of PDRMG. In 2020 Trevor relinquished his role, passing the baton to Kim Leyland, the Group's new Co-ordinator.

The South Peak Raptor Study Group was one of the original groups that formed NERF. Trevor represented the group together with Mick Taylor at NERF meetings and with group help organised two NERF conferences in Bakewell.

Trevor also contributed material to Arjun Amar's 2010 Peregrine paper on behalf of the South Peak Raptor Study Group and he recently submitted material to David Raw for NERF's upcoming 'Lost Peregrine Sites' report.

We wish him well in his well deserved retirement, and NERF is very happy to award him a Certificate of Appreciation.

### **Amanda Miller**

Prior to departing for pastures new Amanda was a highly respected conservationist working tirelessly for the RSPB promoting species and habitat conservation & protection across the North of England.



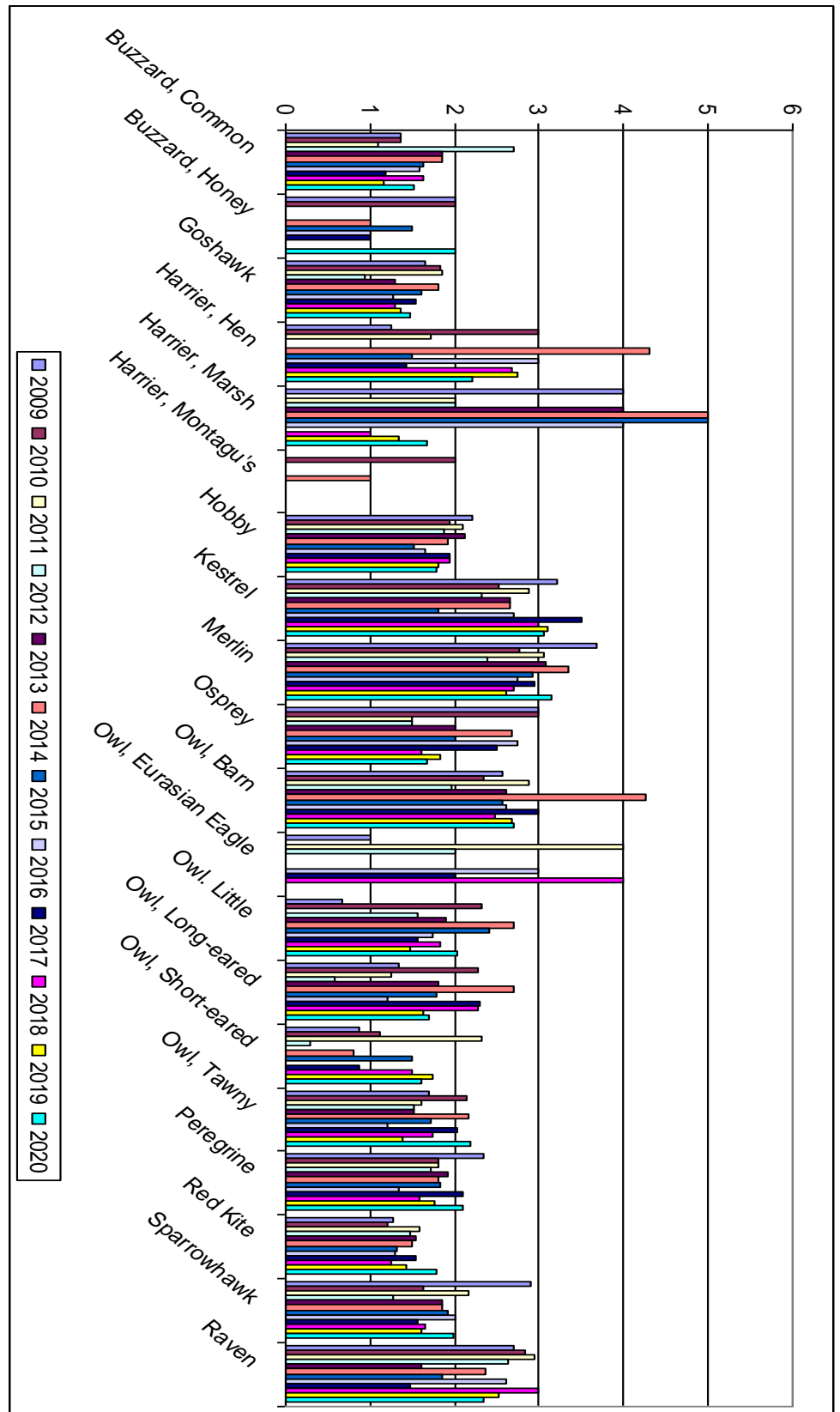
Amanda has been a friend and ally to NERF over many years and we are especially grateful to be able to mark her unfailing support of NERF and her promotion of our voluntary work across a range of other conservation organisations. She has kindly agreed to join the NERF Board of Advisors and we look forward to receiving her wise counsel.

NERF is very pleased to award her a Certificate of Appreciation and wish her well for the future.

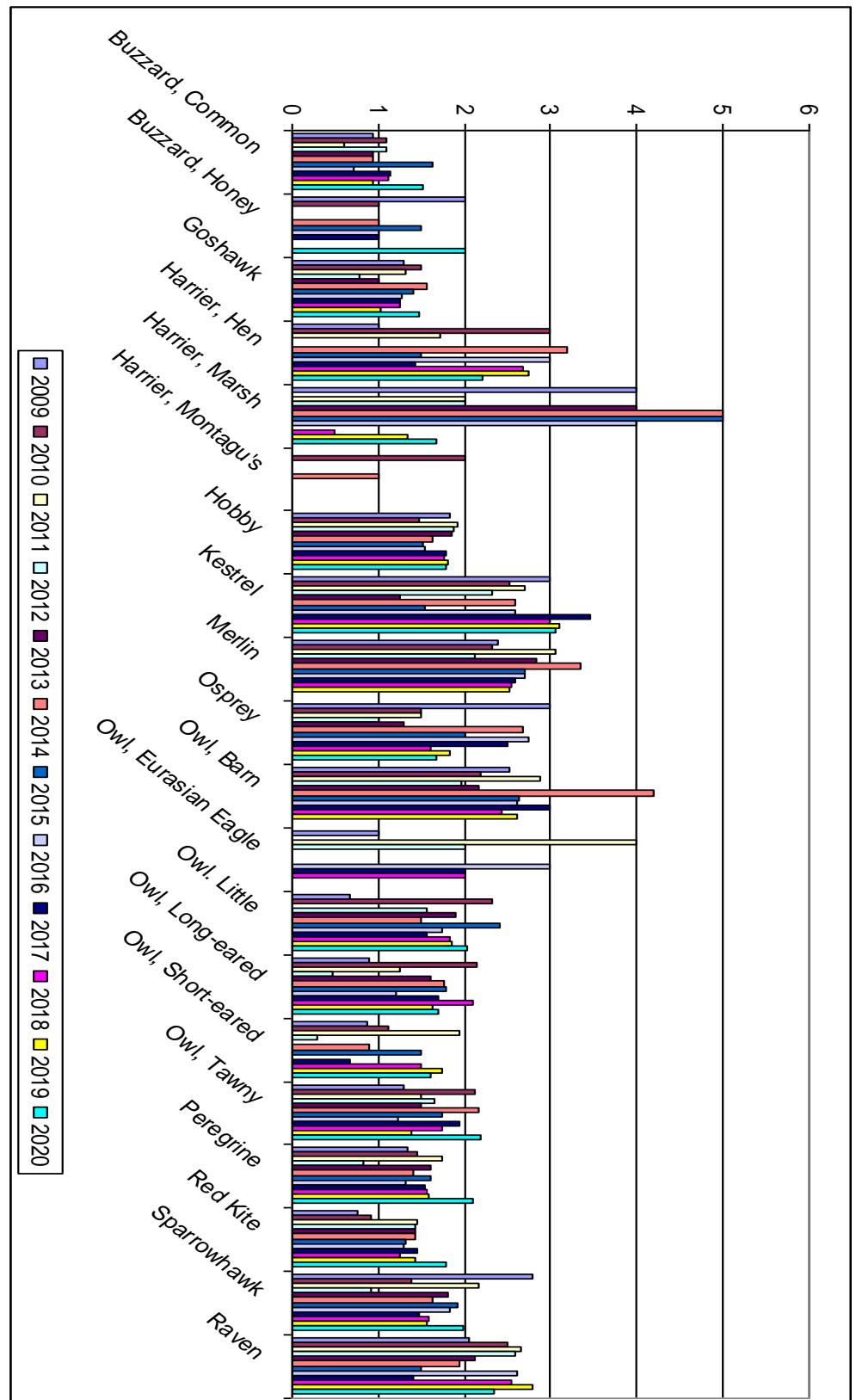
## Appendix 1: Combined NERF data

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	5	5	10	1.67	1.67
Honey-buzzard	9	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	2.00	2.00
Sparrowhawk	119	80	1	7	60	59	55	48	117	1.98	1.95
Goshawk	100	71	4	8	63	62	52	49	92	1.48	1.46
Marsh Harrier	6	6	NC	NC	6	6	5	5	10	1.67	1.67
Hen Harrier	63	14	5	0	14	14	12	11	31	2.20	2.20
Red Kite	62	49	NC	NC	31	29	26	24	52	1.79	1.68
Buzzard	312	208	2	0	108	98	98	95	148	1.51	1.37
Barn Owl	771	476	12	22	463	458	453	577	1242	2.71	2.68
Tawny Owl	423	191	10	1	178	176	157	156	383	2.18	2.15
Little Owl	79	54	20	0	23	23	23	21	47	2.04	2.04
Long-eared Owl	76	58	1	2	55	53	52	49	90	1.70	1.64
Short-eared Owl	97	57	8	1	24	24	23	22	38	1.60	1.60
Eagle Owl	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kestrel	160	92	7	0	84	84	81	80	257	3.06	3.06
Merlin	261	111	5	7	101	100	96	93	314	3.14	3.11
Hobby	66	59	4	1	50	48	47	47	86	1.79	1.72
Peregrine	169	101	9	14	81	79	75	74	165	2.09	2.04
Raven	97	67	2	27	55	54	49	47	127	2.35	2.31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2879</b>	<b>1703</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>1403</b>	<b>1374</b>	<b>1310</b>	<b>1404</b>	<b>3211</b>	<b>2.34</b>	<b>2.29</b>

**Appendix 2: Combined productivity graphs**  
**a) young fledged per pair laying 2009-2020**



**Appendix 2: Combined productivity data**  
**b) young fledged per territorial pair monitored 2009-2020**





### Appendix 3: Ring recoveries and colour ring sightings

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Age	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
CaRSG	Barn Owl	GV99473	24/06/20	Nr Halifax	27/09/20	Kexborough	92 days	31	S	Freshly dead
CaRSG	Barn Owl	GV99474	24/06/20	Nr Hebden Bridge	01/12/20	Nr Hebden Bridge	159 days	5	WNW	Road casualty
MRG	Barn Owl	GR53472	13/06/17	Irlam Moss	28/05/20	Fraddam, Cornwall	2yr 349 days	421	SW	Re-trap, breeding in box (f)
MRG	Barn Owl	GC23932	20/06/20	Astley Moss	13/10/20	Barton Moss	115 days	2.5	E	Re-trap
MRG	Barn Owl	GV25808	25/06/15	Crankwood nr Leigh	12/09/20	Nr Tyldesley	5yr 67 days	13	E	Freshly dead
MRG	Barn Owl	GV09450	03/06/20	Norden nr Rochdale	27/09/20	Leigh	116 days	24	SW	Trapped, into care, died,, starvation
NRG	Barn Owl	GV81311	13/06/18	Reaveley Greens Northumberland	05/01/20	Lilburn Hill, Northumberland	1yr 6m 23 days	6	N	Injured-broken leg
NRG	Barn Owl	GV81354	16/07/19	Otterburn, Northumberland	04/02/20	Hexham	6m 19 days	21	S	Dead in barn
NRG	Barn Owl	GV18690	17/07/19	Wallington Hall, Northumberland	23/06/20	Howick Hall, Northumberland	11m 6 days	40	NNE	Ringed as nestling, controlled
NRG	Barn Owl	GR95229	20/07/16	Harbottle, Northumberland	22/08/20	Thropton, Northumberland	3yr 11m	9	ESE	Road casualty, wounded, fate unknown
NYM	Barn Owl	GY00463	16/06/20	Nr Scaling, N Yorks	16/06/20	Liverton Moor, Redcar & Cleveland	110 days	5	W	Road casualty, stunned, released
NYM	Barn Owl	GY00486	25/06/20	Nr Houltsyke, N. Yorks	22/10/20	Sedgefield, Durham	119 days	44	NW	Freshly dead,, starvation
NYM	Barn Owl	GY00455	15/06/20	Moorsholm, Redcar & Cleveland	05/11/20	Stanghow Moor, Redcar & Cleveland	143 days	2	W	Road casualty
NYM	Barn Owl	GV89531	07/07/18	Goathland, N Yorks	05/11/20	Carlton in Cleveland	2yr 4m	36	W	Road casualty
NYM	Barn Owl	GY00406	13/07/18	Grange Head, N Yorks	21/05/20	Sneaton nr Whitby	10m 8 days	11	NE	Trapped in barn, not fresh
NYM	Barn Owl	GY29602	30/06/20	Borrowby, N Yorks	06/09/20	Borrowby Moor. N Yorks	68 days	0	-	Freshly dead
NYM	Barn Owl	GV89582	22/06/19	Danby Dale, N Yorks	12/08/20	Nr Ugthorpe, N Yorks	1yr 1m 21days	15	NE	Road casualty
NYM	Barn Owl	GY00477	22/06/20	Glaisdale, N Yorks	14/12/20	Gerrick, Redcar & Cleveland	5m 22 days	10	N	Road casualty

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Age	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	FB04534	02/07/19	Wingerworth, Derbs	01/04/20	Spitewinter, Ashover, Derbs	273 days	6	W	RTA
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV05981	02/09/16	Little Fenton, N Yorks	01/03/20	Yorkshire Swan & Wildlife hospital, Selby	3yrs 6m	17	ESE	Unhealthy
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV25203	24/06/19	Elmton, Derbs	09/04/20	Ranby, Notts	201 days	18	ENE	RTA
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV25212	04/06/19	Youlgreave, Derbs	24/03/20	Newhaven,, Derbs	294 days	5	SSW	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV59417	26/05/20	Slade Hooton, S Yorks	29/03/20	Brookhouses, nr Loughton, S Yorks	306 days	0	N	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Barn Owl	GV83414	25/06/20	Bole Hill, Derbs	07/09/20	Grindleford, S Yorks	74 days	2	e	Fractured wing
SPRSG & PDRMG	Buzzard	GV25094	09/06/18	Bentley Spring, W Yorks	10/07/20	Langwith, Notts	2yrs 11m 1 day	52	SSE	Dead bird found
NRG	Goshawk	HY96322	06/07/17	Kielder Forest, Northumberland	02/02/20	Longframlington, Northumberland	2yr 6m 27 days	41	E	Ringed as nestling,, dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Hobby	EA12611	24/07/20	Whitley Bridge, N Yorks	09/10/20	Preixan, Aude, FRANCE	77 days	1201	SSE	Found with injury
MRG	Kestrel	EY02987	12/06/18	Irlam Moss	22/07/20	Knowsley Safari Park	2yr 3m 10 days	26	W	Freshly dead (predated)
MRG	Kestrel	EA06978	22/06/20	Sinderland nr Altrincham	23/07/20	New Mills, Derbs	31 days	27	E	Freshly dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EA12673	30/05/20	Bramley, Derbs	06/09/20	Tickhill, S Yorks	99 days	23	EBE	Dying, entered building
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EZ54209	12/05/19	Rabbit Ings, S Yorks	26/07/20	Shafton, Barnsley	1yr 2m 14 days	0	N	Dead, not fresh
SPRSG & PDRMG	Kestrel	EZ54384	15/06/20	Whitwell, Derbs	07/07/20	Whitwell, Derbs	22 days	0	N	Drowned in artificial water container
SPRSG & PDRMG	Little Owl	EA33000	13/06/20	Owler Bar, Derbs	20/07/20	Holmesfield, Derbs		2	W	Freshly dead
NRG	Merlin	EX47792	20/06/20	Cheviot Hills, Northumberland	18/11/20	Sutton Bridge, Lincolnshire	4m 21 days	336	SSE	Ringed as nestling, dead
SPRSG & PDRMG	Merlin	EH11496	22/06/20	Burbage Moor, S Yorks	16/09/20	Thornton Moor, N Yorks	86 days	74	NNW	RTA
MRG	Peregrine (colour ring K4)	GC47849	04/06/08	Bolton Town Hall	09/09/20	Sherburn, Co. Durham	12yr 3m 5days	147	NNE	Freshly dead (injury)

Group	Species	Ring No.	Date ringed	Location	Date recovered	Location	Age	Distance from ringing site (km)	Direction	Comment
MRG	Peregrine	GC47849 (colour ring 2D)	16/05/20	Trencherfield Mill, Wigan	10/11/20	Martland, Wigan	178 days	0	W	Dead in garden
MRG	Peregrine	8D (colour ring)	29/05/20	Edgworth nr Bolton	23/06/20	Edgworth nr Bolton	37 days	0.5	W	RTA
MRG	Peregrine	GY09438 (colour ring 5D)	25/05/20	Pear Mill, Bredbury	11/07/20 (and again 08/12/20)	Audenshaw Resrs nr Manchester	47 days	5	N	Re-sighting of colour ring
MRG	Peregrine	GV92109 (colour ring VR)	10/05/18	Leigh Spinners Mill, Leigh	30/05/20	Manchester Town Hall	2yrs 20 days	18	E	Breeding, colour ring read in field
MRG	Peregrine	RX (colour ring)	10/06/16	Edgworth	08/05/20	Shuttleworth nr Ramsbottom	3yr 11m 22 days	14	E	Holding territory, did not breed
MRG	Peregrine	GR221384 (colour ring DA)	27/05/11	Horwich nr Bolton	May 2020 and 27/04/21	Bolton Town Hall	9yrs+	8	W	Resident male, breeding
MRG	Peregrine	GR26900 (colour ring was FV, lost)	21/05/12	Leigh Spinners Mill, Leigh	2013-2021	Trencherfield Mill, Wigan	8yrs +	8	NW	Resident male, breeding
MRG	Peregrine	JD (colour ring)	May 2012	Whitworth nr Rochdale	2013-2021	Trencherfield Mill, Wigan	8yrs +	48	SW	Resident female, breeding
NRG	Sparrowhawk	EZ12979	04/07/19	Slaley Forest, Northumberland	21/07/20	Corbidge, Northumberland	1yr 17 days	6	NNE	Ringed as nestling
MRG	Tawny Owl	GV90462	16/05/19	Three Sisters, Ashton nr Wigan	22/10/20	Three Sisters, Ashton nr Wigan	1yr 5m 6 days	0	-	Found dead
NRG	Tawny Owl	GY19085	02/06/20	Kielder Forest Northumberland	25/11/20	Cramlington, Northumberland	5m 23 days	66	ESE	RTA
NRG	Tawny Owl	GR57908	28/04/14	Grizedale, Cumbria	06/10/20	Hawkshead, Cumbria	6yrs 5m 8 days	4	N	Dead, not recent
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC43433	18/05/11	Stonehaugh, Northumberland	2014-2020	Stonehaugh, Northumberland	9yrs	0	-	Controlled
NRG	Tawny Owl	GC43494	06/05/11	Tarset, Northumberland	2014-2020	Tarset, Northumberland	9yrs	0	=	Controlled
NRG	Tawny Owl	GN66529	28/04/03	Tarset, Northumberland	2010-2020	Tarset, Northumberland	17yrs	0	-	Controlled
SPRSG & PDRMG	Tawny Owl	GV53854	05/05/19	Owlthorpe, S Yorks	29/05/20	Woodhouse, Sheffield	1yr 24 days	3	NNE	Drowned in artificial water container
SPRSG & PDRMG	Tawny Owl	GR36988	16/05/17	Cat Wood, Derbs	28/04/20	Glossop, Derbs	2yrs 11m 14 days	4	NNW	RTA

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