



## Hen Harrier Action: Winter 2022 Newsletter

Welcome to our winter newsletter. It looks ahead to our plans for 2023 and reports some sad news about Iris, one of our satellite-tagged hen harriers. There's been a lot happening on the global stage with the climate change COP in November and the biodiversity COP about to start.



## Hen Harrier Action News

### Farewell to Ian

Ian Cooper has unfortunately decided to step down from the Hen Harrier Action board. We'd like to thank him for all his efforts on our behalf and on behalf of the hen harriers of Wales.

### Young Filmmaker Competition

As we approach winter, we are once again inviting young people to enter a filmmaking competition, this time on the subject of 'Survival'. There will be three prizes, in the form of vouchers, for £500, £300 and £100, to be spent on photographic/filmmaking equipment. Entrants can interpret the title in a broad sense but are asked to concentrate on wildlife in the UK. Our main aim is to encourage interest in the natural world among both the entrants and the audience the films reach. Young people often have an imagination which does not presuppose a conventional approach and we are hoping to be surprised by the content, style and message. If you know any young people who would be interested in this competition, please direct them to our [website](#), where all the details can be found.

## Look ahead to Skydancer Day 2023 - can you help?

We're planning on holding another online Skydancer Day in 2023 and would like your help with the content. As usual, we aim to put together a mix of factual reportage with creative items - music, dance, poetry. It will feature the winning entries from the Young Filmmaker Competition. We've never yet had a dance item on Skydancer Day, which seems rather a shame. Are you in a dance group which could create a dance performance, or do you know of one?

We'd welcome your ideas and contributions - please get in touch via [info@henharrierday.uk](mailto:info@henharrierday.uk).

## Our hen harriers

Charlie continued to spend time in the Forest of Bowland, generally in the southeast, close to Dunsop Bridge. Macha had a busy few weeks, heading southeast to the coast near Bempton, then inland towards Leeds before moving north through the Pennines to end the period on moorland north of the Stainmore Gap.

Data received in late September from the tag fitted to Iris indicated that, sadly, she had died. RSPB Investigations staff recovered her body from an area of dune grassland near Dornoch in eastern Sutherland and submitted her to the SRUC veterinary laboratory where a post mortem confirmed she had succumbed to avian influenza.

This highly infectious disease has widely affected over 60 bird species in the UK, notably wildfowl, seabirds and some birds of prey. Anyone finding three dead wild waterfowl, a single dead bird of prey, or five or more dead wild birds of any other species in the same place at the same time, is asked to report them to DEFRA's national telephone helpline: 03459 33 55 77.

## Birdcrime 2021 Summary by Jenny Shelton

The [RSPB's Birdcrime 2021](#) report was launched on 15 November, revealing the confirmed incidents of raptor persecution for that year. Unfortunately, 2021 saw 108 confirmed incidents of birds of prey being shot, trapped and poisoned. In England alone there were 80 confirmed incidents: this is the second-highest figure on record for England after 2020's unprecedented surge. The total included 50 buzzards, 16 red kites, seven peregrines and three goshawks. Hen harriers, golden eagles and white-tailed eagles also continue to be affected.

Of course, with crimes like these being extremely difficult to detect, it's certain more killings will have taken place undetected or unreported. Scientific papers, intelligence and satellite-tagging studies

for key species such as hen harrier have confirmed that the annual Birdcrime totals are only the tip of a far larger iceberg.

As mentioned above, in England alone there were 80 confirmed incidents. One incident involved a gruesome mass grave of birds of prey located by RSPB Investigations and the police down a well on a pheasant shoot in Wiltshire.

In Scotland, a golden eagle was found poisoned, lying beside a dead hare laced with the same banned pesticide, on a grouse shooting estate with a history of raptor persecution.

In Wales, RSPB Investigations officers assisting North Wales Police found a poisoned red kite, a shot buzzard and 18 toxic chemicals illegally stored.

Raptor persecution continues to affect the population recovery of hen harriers: a rare moorland breeding bird which should be a far commoner sight. Reports for over two decades have identified criminal persecution as the main factor suppressing the UK hen harrier population. Modern technology in the form of GPS satellite tagging continues to reveal suspicious disappearances of young hen harriers, including Asta, whose government-funded tag was later found inexplicably attached to a dead crow. Her body was never recovered. However, the circumstances are highly suspicious.

Over two-thirds (71%) of all confirmed incidents of raptor persecution in 2021 related to land managed for gamebird shooting. It's clear that raptor persecution is an issue on both grouse shoots and pheasant/partridge shoots.

As such, the RSPB is urging UK governments to follow Scotland's example in introducing licensing for driven grouse shooting. This would surely act as a greater deterrent to estates, who would risk losing their licence to operate for a given time if a crime took place on their land. The RSPB is also calling for better enforcement of existing regulations and additional regulations for pheasant and partridge shooting.

Mark Thomas, RSPB Head of Investigations UK, said: "The data in this report clearly show that raptor persecution remains at a sustained high level, especially in England, with over two-thirds of the incidents connected to land managed for gamebird shooting.

"The illegal shooting, trapping and poisoning of birds of prey has no place in modern society. In a nature and climate emergency, the deliberate destruction of protected species for financial gain is completely devastating and unacceptable.

"The time for reform is now long overdue."

## **Hen harrier roost at RSPB Insh Marshes by Paul Samuels**

"I was fortunate to be able to spend four consecutive evenings at Insh Marshes this October in order to film the local hen harriers coming in to roost. As the light begins to fade, it creates a few technical challenges for a filmmaker, in addition to those that already come

with working with any animals! I set up in the cover of a small woodland area, to disguise my own outline and trying not to disturb the birds unnecessarily. I had a very powerful telephoto lens (800mm) as the birds fly in at quite a distance from any access point. And I had local expertise to guide me!

The harriers were reliably on time most of the four days and I arrived each time, in situ, at about 4.30pm. While their arrival was predictable timewise, the direction from which they came wasn't, so it was essential to constantly scan the marsh both with and without binoculars. Once sighted, it was clear they were being appropriately cautious, and spent a significant time circling above us and the marsh. Good news for the filmmaker. Only one of the females came to rest on a gate before disappearing into the reeds, while the others glided around for some time, before swooping down into the reed bed. In total we saw, most evenings, two males and three or more ringtails.

On one exciting occasion, I was able to film one of the males being harassed by what we decided was a very reckless sparrowhawk. The first time it was seen off by an accompanying female but on the second encounter, the male held his own and the sparrowhawk retreated again. It was some distance from our location but the aggressive bird seemed a bit smaller than the harriers and not quite big enough to be a peregrine.

You can decide for yourself if you view the collected [clips](#) I recorded.

I wonder if future generations will be as fortunate as I was? Unless we continue to campaign against raptor persecution, the populations of these and other raptors may fall below sustainable levels; especially in grouse moor locations. The law doesn't seem to deter those who wish to shoot for entertainment and for whom these wonderful birds are perceived as a financial threat. Please consider asking your family and friends to make a small contribution to those organisations that work continuously for the protections of these species."

## News roundup

### **Progress on grouse moor licensing in Scotland**

The Scottish Government has now published its [consultation document](#) on grouse moor licensing; Revive have produced a helpful [guide](#) to contributing.

### **Another missing hen harrier**

Sadly, yet another satellite-tagged hen harrier has disappeared in unexplained circumstances. Sia, a female hen harrier born in southern Scotland, disappeared close to Hamsterley Forest in County Durham on 10 October. To no surprise, Hamsterley Forest is close to land managed for driven grouse shooting.

Durham police issued a press statement and call for information on 4 November. Anyone with any information on what happened to Sia is asked call 101 quoting incident reference number 79 of October 19, email PC Williamson at david.williamson@durham.police.uk or contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

### **COPs 27 (climate change) & 15 (biodiversity)**

COP27 had a few positives, although the lack of further commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions bodes ill for limiting global

temperature rise to 1.5°C. From an uplands perspective, a win was the reference in the final decision to “nature-based solutions”. This could mean returning land used for driven grouse shooting to its natural state: peat bog, forest and scrub. A win for both climate and wildlife! But there was no linkage between this and COP15, taking place in Canada from 7-19 December (still chaired by China).

With stark warnings from scientists about a sixth mass extinction caused by human activity, it’s vital that an ambitious agreement emerges (and that countries take real action as a result). Unfortunately, this COP doesn’t receive the same level of attention from world leaders as the climate change one. A coalition of UK wildlife groups have launched a petition urging Rishi Sunak to attend [insert link <https://urgentconversation.org/tell-the-pm>] and 40 MPs (some Conservative) have written to the PM with the same message. But at this point the UK is expected to be represented by Environment Secretary Therese Coffey.

How is the UK doing on biodiversity at the moment? Not brilliantly, it would seem. The government is behind on its existing pledge to protect 30% of our land and seas by 2030, the nature-friendly replacement for the common agricultural policy is still not in place and the water companies are not doing a great job of protecting the rivers and seas of England and Wales (partly due to lax regulation and enforcement). Updated UK biodiversity indicators are due to be published on 14 December.

But to end on a happier note...



Photo and artwork: Andrea Hudspeth

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Many thanks to all the supporters who have once again been so

generous in supporting our work. As ever, the encouragement it gives us is at least equal to the monetary value of the donation. So we always welcome donations, especially new regular contributions. To make a donation, click [here](#), (if eligible please click the Gift Aid box too).

You can still buy the Stronghill song premiered on Skydancer Day [here](#) – Stronghill have very generously donated all the proceeds to us and we are very grateful.

### Hen Harrier Action

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