



Hen Harrier Action: April 2023 Newsletter

Easter is almost upon us, and Spring is finally creeping in. Our Hen Harriers will be back on their upland breeding grounds now and spectacular skydancing displays will be taking place as males attempt to impress potential breeding partners.

Few of us will have a chance to witness this first-hand, but it was heartening to see this aerial performance captured on film for David Attenborough's Wild Isles episode three – Grasslands.



Hen Harrier Action News

Welcome news on Scottish grouse moor legislation

The Wildlife Management & Muirburn (Scotland) Bill, proposing licensing for grouse moors and other measures, is included on the agenda for this parliamentary session. We asked RSPB Scotland's Duncan Orr-Ewing for his reactions, and you can read extracts from the interview below.

Skydancer Day is coming to your screens on the 7th May

Wildlife presenter Megan McCubbin and Hen Harrier Action's Indy Kiemel Greene will host this year's online Skydancer Day event, from the Hawk Conservancy Trust in Hampshire, with an exciting line-up, including the much-awaited announcement of this year's Young Wild Writer competition.

Find out more on our [website](#), and tune in live on our [YouTube](#)

[channel](#).

A song for Skydancers

21-year-old Eddie Brown from Par in Cornwall has written a poignant song about Hen Harrier persecution – Skydancing – and is contributing all sales from the track to Hen Harrier Action. You can listen and buy the song [here](#).

What's more, his grandfather Ian, a former ship's captain, and keen amateur artist, has painted a stunning portrait of a male Hen Harrier in flight for auction, and Megan and Indy will be announcing details of how you could bid to own this remarkable painting on Skydancer Day. Again, the proceeds will go to Hen Harrier Action.

Our new website is now live...

...and we'd be delighted to hear your feedback. We've converted the website to the popular WordPress format and made it cleaner and easier to navigate. Let us know what you think.

In conversation with RSPB Scotland's Duncan Orr-Ewing

A long-awaited draft bill – The Wildlife Management Bill – has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament's legislative agenda for debate in the coming months. It is particularly good news for everyone concerned about raptor persecution, as it proposes a licensing regime for grouse shooting, alongside other legal measures designed to protect wildlife and upland landscapes, including the regulation of all muirburn and tighter controls on the use of traps.

We caught up with Duncan Orr-Ewing, Head of Species & Land Management at RSPB Scotland, to find out more. Duncan has actively campaigned for legislative change and an end to the illegal killing of birds of prey.

HHA: What is your overall reaction to the announcement last week?

We're very pleased with what the Scottish Government has brought forward, building on the recommendations of the Independent Grouse Moors Group report, the Werrity Review.

The purpose of the Bill, which we strongly agree with, is to give better protection to birds of prey and to stop the illegal killing. The main provisions are to bring in a licensing system for all grouse shooting, and the enforcement of that would be based on a civil burden of proof

basis, that is “balance of probabilities”, rather than the current criminal burden of proof.

Up till now, securing convictions based on a criminal burden of proof has been difficult, as often these crimes take place in remote areas with few witnesses, so connecting the crime with an individual can be very difficult.

Another important aspect of the legislation is to extend the licensing regulations to both the area where grouse shooting takes place, and the named and responsible individual. This links to previous vicarious liability legislation which has been in force in Scotland since 2011.

HHA: The proposed introduction of a licensing scheme for grouse moors has attracted criticism from some quarters. Why is this aspect of the Bill so controversial?

We didn’t expect everyone to welcome these proposals, but there have been plenty of warnings that unless the grouse-shooting sector improved their practices, then tighter regulation would follow. As far back as 1998, First Minister Donald Dewar described raptor persecution in Scotland as “a national disgrace”.

I guess that the grouse-shooting lobby is concerned about increased bureaucracy, but every other type of natural resource management, such as tree felling, fishing, or water extraction, is licensed, so I believe that the same standards should apply to gamebird shooting.

Most European countries license gamebirds shooting and hunting in some way, and the UK has for too long been an exception.

HHA: The second part of the Bill strengthens the regulation of muirburn, requiring a licence to carry out burning at any time of the year. Is this a positive step for wildlife?

The current legislation in Scotland for muirburn dates back to 1946, the immediate post-war era, when land was needed to feed a hungry nation. Now the priority is the climate and nature emergency, and we need appropriate legislation to reflect the crisis.

Much of Scotland is covered by peatland soil, which stores a huge amount of carbon, and can be damaged by inappropriate land management. A lot of our peatlands are already seriously degraded, and the Scottish Government is rightly investing £250m over 10 years into restoring peatlands. This public investment should not be compromised.

HHA: What will the RSPB and other organisations be doing now to ensure that the Bill reaches the statute books without being watered down?

I’ve worked for the RSPB for 30 years and managed the RSPB Investigations team in Scotland and now across the UK for 20 years, and this legislation has been one of our top priorities for a long time, so we want to get it over the line. We want to see it deliver meaningful outcomes to deliver better protection for Scotland’s birds of prey.

HHA: Do you think this Bill represents the beginning of the end for grouse moors, at least in Scotland, or is there still hope for them, if they can respond to change?

I think there is still a future for responsibly and sustainably managed

grouse moors. Sustainable grouse shooting, such as walked-up grouse shooting, would have few objections from the RSPB. Our concerns arise with the most intensively managed grouse moors, where the main intention seems to be to deliver very large grouse bags, with damaging consequences for biodiversity and peatlands. We also know that in the last 20 years, the intensity of management on these grouse moors has increased significantly and, in many places, illegal killing of birds of prey and the scale of burning on peatlands is much worse.

HHA: Can you foresee a time when this kind of legislation will be adopted across all the countries of the United Kingdom?

Most of the illegal killing of birds of prey associated with gamebird shooting, and especially grouse moor management, are concentrated in Scotland and Northern England. We would hope that a future Westminster Government would look at what happens in Scotland in the next few years and consider introducing similar legislation.

Duncan was instrumental, along with Logan Steele of the Scottish Raptor Study Group and Hen Harrier Action's own Andrea Hudspeth, in submitting a petition to the Scottish Parliament with over 23,000 signatures calling for an end to raptor persecution through the introduction of a licensing scheme back in 2013, which led eventually to the Werritty Review.

Look out for the full interview with Duncan on our website in the next few days.

News roundup

Young male Hen Harrier illegally killed in South Yorkshire

South Yorkshire Police have confirmed that Anu, a male Hen Harrier born in the Forest of Bowland in 2021 and satellite tagged by the RSPB, was illegally killed. Despite extensive searching, his body was never found, but his tag was located by the RSPB Investigations Team. The harness straps had been deliberately cut prior to being removed and discarded. You can read the full story of Anu's short life in this [Northern England Raptor Forum post](#).

Launch of The People's Plan for Nature

A major new joint campaign from WWF-UK, the RSPB and the National Trust, Save Our Wild Isles has been launched, building on the success of David Attenborough's Wild Isles TV series. You can find out more, and support The People's Plan for Nature, which calls for urgent action to protect and restore nature, at this newly launched [campaign website](#).

Support us: Support Hen Harriers

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

Website: henharrierday.uk

Registered charity: SC049943

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