
1995 RAPTOR ROUND UP

Produced by the
Scottish Ornithologists' Club
on behalf of all
Scottish Raptor Study Groups
with grant aid from
Scottish Natural Heritage



Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of the new style Raptor Round Up. This replaces the article that used to appear in *Scottish Bird News*. It is produced by the Scottish Ornithologists' Club on behalf of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups with grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage.

We know that for some years many RSG workers have wanted a wider forum in which to publicise the groups' work. We hope that this first attempt is a significant step in that direction.

The amount of material available has been increasing to the extent that recent Round Ups could contain only a small amount of it. We hope that the new format will provide scope for more in depth presentation of RSG work and that it will develop into a publication into which the groups have greater direct input.

We have departed from the traditional species by species, group by group summaries and adopted a less rigid format to provide a mixture of summaries, comments, data tables and pieces of general interest. In most cases, contributors' names appear at the end of each piece, as before. If we have omitted anyone or attributed material wrongly, we apologise. Wherever possible we have retained the style of the workers who provided the material but, in all cases, restrictions on available space have forced us to wield the editorial pencil. These space restrictions meant that - for the first time - we did not solicit material from groups who had not submitted anything by the time of preparation. Indeed, space was so restricted initially that we had to modify our original plan for a 16 page publication and increase this to 20 pages. For this reason the Round Up appears in paper rather than cardboard covers in order to remain within the available budget.

We welcome all (constructive!) comments from Scottish raptor workers on how this publication should develop in future. Groups submitting material for the 1996 Round Up are invited to present it in the format in which they would like to see it published. Whilst this is likely to produce even more copy than we can immediately accommodate we would positively welcome such an embarrassment of riches. We also welcome artwork or photographs. Artists should note that photocopies are perfectly acceptable.

Keith Morton

This report was compiled by Keith Morton assisted by Sylvia Laing and Stan da Prato

Kestrels in Ayrshire in 1995

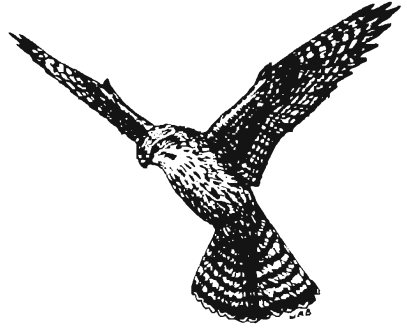
The expected crash of vole numbers plus an extremely wet, windy and cold late winter and early spring resulted in the lowest occupancy of territories in study areas since 1972. Conditions improved in May and through to the end of the breeding season the cold but dry conditions suited the Kestrels. Those which did attempt to breed were very productive.

Only 50% of territories were occupied and only 18 clutches were recorded. Eight out of 9 lowland pairs and 4 out of 9 upland pairs laid in April. The first egg was laid on 15 April and the average clutch size was 5 eggs. Compared to 1994, when 11 clutches of 6 eggs were laid, only one pair completed a clutch of 6 in 1995, though one lowland pair laid 7 eggs, all of which hatched.

Only 7 hens and one cock bird were caught, but the weights were significant even for such a small sample and reflected the poor build up to the season. One hen weighed in at only 220g and the average for all the hens was 260g (1994: 277g, 1993: 283g). One breeding hen had been reared in an adjacent territory in 1994 and another hen bred successfully for the second year in the same nest site.

74% of eggs laid hatched and brood survival was at its normal high level at 86%. Four pairs failed, all at the clutch stage. One cliff site was washed out in a short spell of torrential rain. Eggs were removed by persons unknown from another 2 sites. The fourth failure was the first year hen which laid the first eggs very late (30 May), completed a clutch of 4 but did not incubate.

Although there was no evidence of breeding pairs being predated by Goshawks as in 1994, the 2 affected study areas only had



Kestrel

Bill Brackenridge

Kestrels breeding on the periphery and this accounted in part for the low occupancy rate.

The production rate for those pairs which bred was high in terms of numbers of young fledged. The average number of young reared from all breeding attempts was 3.37 young and successful pairs raised 4.25. The 4 pairs at the ICI plant at Ardeer reared 20 young.

Six ringing recoveries were received. A youngster ringed near Pinwherry in 1988 was found at Barrhill (6 years 3 days), one ringed near Culzean in 1993 was found near Straitor (1 year 254 days). Two 1994 Waterhead birds were recovered, one near Middlesex after 254 days, the other a mile from its natal site in spring 1995, a victim no doubt of the inclement weather. A 1994 ICI bird was found dead in October of the same year in Devon. Pride of place, however, goes to another Culzean bird ringed on 19 June 1994. It was killed when it flew into high tension cables in Tenerife on the Canary Islands on 11 October of the same year. Only 114 days but a magnificent 3076km, smashing the previous Ayrshire record by 1280km (a 1975 bird which turned up in northern Spain).

***Gordon Riddle
S Strathclyde RSG***

Some thoughts on the long term prospects of Golden Eagles and Peregrines in Central Scotland, Southwest Perthshire and beyond

Golden Eagle

In 1995 the 10 regular Golden Eagle home ranges in Central Scotland and Southwest Perthshire were monitored by 6 individual observers. All 10 were occupied, probably by pairs in each case, although in one instance it is not certain that a pair was present. Four successful pairs reared 6 young. One of these pairs which had been persistently robbed of its eggs in recent years only succeeded because of an intensive nest watching operation.

By way of contrast, in the remainder of Perthshire west of the A9, at 13 home ranges checked, only 2 pairs were successful, rearing 4 young. In Perthshire east of the A9 and in Angus (generally more productive areas for Golden Eagles) at 16 home ranges checked, 7 successful pairs reared 11 young. The 3 areas combined thus produced an average of 0.54 young per Golden Eagle home range, a reasonably satisfactory result.

The best available estimate is that Golden Eagles must produce 0.5 young per pair over a period of years in order to maintain the population. From recorded breeding results from the 10 regular Central and Southwest Perthshire home ranges from 1978 to 1995 (108 known out of a total of 180 potential "pair years"), an annual average of 0.45 young were reared per home range. That however ignores the fact that in a few instances single birds only may have been present so the average number of young reared per pair may have been higher.

A more important point is that: if one takes known Golden Eagle breeding figures from 1985 to 1995 inclusive for the whole of

Perthshire west of the A9, and for Stirlingshire and Dunbartonshire, a less satisfactory picture emerges of only 0.35 young reared per annum for each occupied home range. This allows for the fact that some occupations of known breeding areas were by single birds only, a classic sign of deliberate persecution.

The inference is that - poor food supply and hillwalker and climber disturbance notwithstanding - this part of the Scottish Golden Eagle population is being held back from realising its full potential by human interference and is maintained on a long term basis only by immigration from more productive breeding areas.

Peregrine

In 1995 I checked 21 Peregrine territories and recorded 12 pairs, 3 apparently single birds and 6 territories apparently unoccupied. Only 5 pairs nested successfully, rearing 12 young. The late lying snow at some of the eyrie locations apparently had an effect on the 1995 breeding season and was probably the cause of the higher than usual non-occupation of territories.

Survey results from a wider area, comprising my own study area, the remainder of Central Scotland and Southwest Perthshire, Clackmannanshire and Kinross-shire revealed from 40 Peregrine territories checked: 22 pairs, 8 apparently single birds and 10 territories apparently unoccupied. Fourteen successful pairs reared 35 young. In this larger area the relatively poor breeding performance, and reported absence of Peregrines from certain territories, is probably a reflection of the adverse late winter and early spring weather although, as usual,

robberies and other interference at certain territories were probably involved.

As anticipated in 1994, one of the 2 extra Peregrine pairs found in my study area that year does appear to have involved one off use of an alternative crag within an existing territory. In the other instance, for the second year running, an extra pair was present at a crag that prior to 1994 had been an alternative site for another pair 1.5 miles away. To some extent, however, it is a matter of swings and roundabouts with another Peregrine territory centred on an old Golden Eagle nest being unoccupied by a pair.

It seems that, in recent years, in Scotland as a whole the general picture of recovery of Peregrine numbers may have been a mixed one, with further increases since the 1991 national survey in certain lowland areas but

decreases in some upland regions. In one previously regular Southwest Perthshire territory birds could not be found in 1994 or 1995, while single Peregrines were recorded in the 2 preceding years. Another formerly regular Southwest Perthshire territory was unoccupied in 1991, 1994 and 1995 (there are no records for 1992 and 1993) and single birds only were recorded in 1988, 1989 and 1990. Moreover, there is a trend in that area for Peregrines to lay eggs some 2 to 3 weeks later than they did in the early 1980s and this could be attributable to a reduced food supply as much as to poor spring weather. This is a very small sample on which to base any firm conclusions, but, if the pattern is being repeated elsewhere, it could indicate a significant decline in Peregrines in our upland areas.

***Patrick Stirling-Aird
Central and Tayside RSG***



Nesting Peregrine

Bill Paton

Highland RSG

Golden Eagle

A good proportion of the pairs (96) were monitored with an especially welcome increase in numbers checked in the eastern part of the area.

Overall breeding success was close to the long term average with 0.5 chicks fledged per pair. Success was rather better than average in Skye but below average in south Lochaber. Differences in breeding success between different parts of the Highland RSG area broadly reflect well known differences in the amount of food available to Eagles in summer. Breeding was somewhat later than usual and in several cases, chicks were still on the nest well into August. This was probably a result of average laying dates being somewhat retarded as a consequence of cold weather and snow in late March/early April. The especially fine weather from mid summer onwards may have benefited Eagles in Skye and outweighed any deleterious effect on breeding success caused by poor weather in early summer.

Jeff Watson

Buzzard

Seventeen observers obtained full details of 73 pairs with partial information relating to a further 4. Most of the information related to Easter Ross and, in particular, Bob Swann's study area. Other areas are much in need of coverage.

Overall productivity was average and very similar to the previous 2 years. In Easter Ross, greatest breeding success was achieved by pairs in areas where Rabbits were plentiful, although a small group of birds in east Inverness produced few young in an

area where Rabbits were present. The poor spring weather is thought to have affected breeding in some areas. There were only 2 instances of possible human interference reported.

The figure for clutch size was inflated by the unprecedented incidence of 2 clutches of 5, from one of which all the young were thought to have fledged. Excluding these clutches, the average would have been 2.8

Malcolm Harvey

Red Kite

1995 was another very good year for Red Kites in the Highlands. The young from 1994 survived their first winter well and at least 10 out of 13 were still alive in early April. 1995 saw the first successful breeding of 3 wildbred Scottish Kites. There were also 4 clutches of 4 eggs - an indication of good feeding conditions prior to laying. Twentysix young were produced (13 in 1994). As more of the population gain breeding experience it is hoped that they can steadily increase the population.

Productivity figures were

<i>No of territories occupied</i>	22
<i>No of pairs which laid eggs</i>	15
<i>Mean clutch size (from 10 nests)</i>	3.1
<i>No of nests which fledged young</i>	11
<i>Mean no of young/successful pair</i>	2.4
<i>% of breeding prs fledging young</i>	73.3%

Spring dispersal of nestlings may be the norm, as chicks initially remain near their nest site until the end of September, attend the communal winter roost from approximately October to March and are then pushed off their winter feeding grounds by territorial adults. To date, 47 Red Kites have been reared in the wild in Scotland. 32 of the wild

*Red Kite**Mike Ashley*

bred Kites are known to be still alive and one has been found dead.

Kites may be identified by the colour of their wing tags. Colours so far are: Orange 1989, Blue 1990 (with black letters, only 4 are known to be alive), Yellow 1991, Lime Green 1992, Red 1993, White 1994 and Blue 1995 (with white letters). Tags used since 1992 have small colour bars at the end. We need to know the date, place, tag colour on left and right wings and, if possible, the letters or numbers on the tags.

Lorcan O'Toole

Peregrine

A total of 44 sites were checked, a significant increase over previous years. 40 were occupied by pairs, but eggs were laid at only

34 sites. Hatching occurred at 26 sites and at least 48 young were assumed to have fledged from 24 successful nests.

Overall, Highland Peregrines appear to have had a slightly below average year. The poor weather in April and May had an adverse affect, either by directly causing nest failure, or by causing difficulties with hunting and food supply. There is also evidence that persecution continues to be a problem and even shows signs of an increase in some areas.

Colin Crooke

Merlin

Twelve observers supplied records relating to 41 sites. Some records contained insufficient information to obtain an accurate picture of breeding success.

Clutch sizes were known at 12 sites giving an average of 4.0, towards the upper end of the range. Only 2 failures were recorded between laying and fledging, both at the egg stage. Eggs disappeared at an Inverness-shire nest, presumed predated. At a Sutherland nest the female was found dead 3m from the nest which still contained eggs. The overall mean brood size per successful nest was 3.42.

Merlins in Strathspey, Moray and Nairn did significantly better than those from other areas perhaps reflecting habitat quality. Just over half the Moray sites checked were unoccupied, for no apparent reason.

Coverage is still poor in Ross & Cromarty, Upper Badenoch & Strathspey, Inverness and parts of Caithness and Sutherland. More Merlin enthusiasts are needed to check these areas.

Jim Craib

Hen Harrier

A total of 43 active nests were monitored. This is less than the 1994 total (51). The time and effort spent checking sites was the same in both years. Much of the decline in the number of nests found is due to a large reduction in breeding pairs found in the east Inverness and Nairn study area (9 in 1994, 3 in 1995). It is suspected that this results from early spring persecution of birds attempting to settle on grouse moors. Mild weather in April encouraged much conspicuous aerial activity and made some Harriers easy targets. The breeding success in these southern districts, where the pairs are mainly on grouse moors, was again poor. Only 36% of nests found produced young (mean brood size/successful nest 2.9; mean brood size/nest found 1.0). This is well below the 1988-94 long term average of 45%; 3.4. The inescapable truth is that systematic destruction of Harriers is an established, but covert, management practice on most grouse moors in our area. This illegal persecution is the underlying cause of the continuing poor breeding success and reduced distribution and abundance of these raptors throughout east Inverness, Nairn, Strathspey and Moray.



Female Hen Harrier

Nick Picozzi

All was not gloom! Many pairs breeding in the northern districts (east Sutherland and Ross-shire) had a successful season. The long, dry summer helped to fledge some large broods including 5 of 5 young and 1 of 6 (only the second record since 1988). Most breeding attempts occurred on unkept moors, or in young forestry. 76% of nests were successful, raising 60 young; mean brood size/successful nest 3.8; mean brood size/nest found 2.9. These figures are higher than the 1998-94 long term average of 74%; 3.1 and 2.3 (n 134) respectively.

<i>District</i>	<i>Nests with full clutches</i>	<i>Mean clutch size</i>	<i>Nests failed</i>	<i>Nests successful</i>	<i>Total young fledged</i>
Predominantly unkept					
E Sutherland	13	4.9	2	11	40
E Ross	8	5.4	3	5	20
Total	21	5.1	5	16	60
Predominantly grouse moor					
E Inverness/Nairn	3	5.0	3	0	0
Strathspey	8	5.6	6	2	8
Moray	11	5.5	5	6	15
Total	22	5.5	14	8	23

Brian Etheridge

Kestrel

Twenty nine sites held pairs, 2 less than 1994. Most records again came from nestboxes followed by old Crow nest and cliff sites.

Mean clutch size (5.4) was the second highest for the past 6 years. Mean brood size (4.7) was the highest for the past 6 years. Productivity was up 0.1 from 1994 to 4.2. It appears that Kestrels made the best of the good weather conditions of the late spring and early summer.

Caithness had a much better mean brood size, but again there was only a very small sample from this area with most records coming from Easter Ross and East Sutherland.

Mick Canham

Tawny Owl productivity

Area	No laying	No successful	No young reared	No fledged/pr
Easter Ross	20	13	21	1.1
Rest	23	20	35	1.5
All	43	33	56	1.3

Bob Swann

Tawny Owl

Records were received from 43 nests. These were well distributed throughout the Highland RSG area, with most coming from Easter Ross. No other sub area had enough data to do separate analysis.

The apparent poorer performance of Easter Ross birds may be due to a bias in data collection. More boxes from this area are checked during incubation than elsewhere, giving a greater chance of recording early failures. Indeed the low number of young fledging per pair laying in Easter Ross was partly due to 35% of all these nests failing prior to hatching. Brood size of successful nests in Easter Ross (1.6) was close to the overall average of 1.7.

1995 was another fairly average year, though clutch size was the lowest we have recorded (2.4, n=29).



Tawny Owl with Common Shrew

Don Smith

Northeast RSG

Peregrine

At inland sites comparison between grouse moor and non grouse moor suggest higher persecution on grouse moors. There was widespread failure in the Ladder Hills but it is difficult to separate problems of weather and persecution. Birds on coastal sites had irregular success and were less successful than those inland. Possibly there are residual toxins in their prey.

<i>Sites</i>	<i>Checked</i>	<i>Occupied</i>	<i>Known to have laid</i>	<i>Known to fledge</i>	<i>Min. no fledged</i>
Total	83	60	43	22	41
Grouse moor	37	25	20	4	9
Non grouse moor	28	21	12	11	23
Coast	18	14	11	7	9+
	<i>% occupied/ checked</i>	<i>% laid/ occupied</i>	<i>% fledged/ occupied</i>	<i>% min young/ occupied</i>	<i>%minyoung/ successful</i>
Grouse moor	68	80	16	0.36	2.25
Non grouse moor	75	57	52	1.10	2.09
Coast	77	79	50	0.64	1.29

Jon Hardey

Golden Eagle

From 17 pairs, 13 laid eggs of which 10 pairs reared a total of 13 young. There were 2 clutches of 3 eggs. There were 3 new sites, one in a tree, one cliff site and one on an artificial nest.

Robert Rae

Merlin

In Deeside 26 pairs were located. Sixteen of them succeeded and reared 47 young. In Donside a decline in the past couple of years has been noted. From 12 expected pairs, only 4 pairs were located of which only 2 reared young. Sites were occupied early but affected by late snow. There were no pairs found on the Buchan Plain where there was not an apparent snow problem. There was some evidence of competition with Hen Harriers.

Graham Rebecca, Brian Cosnette

Hen Harrier

Workers reported 17 known nests up to 10 of which were known or thought to be successful. Despite the recent presence of up to 25 pairs in Kincardine & Deeside, it is thought that no birds are now successful there. Grampian now has the highest number of tagged Hen Harriers in Scotland due to the rapid turnover there.

Brian Etheridge, Graham Rebecca & Brian Cosnette

South Strathclyde and Dumfries & Galloway RSGs

Merlins

<i>Region</i>	<i>Occupied territories</i>	<i>Nest not found</i>	<i>Nests found (br proved)</i>	<i>Success nests</i>	<i>Failed nests</i>	<i>Outcome completely unknown</i>	<i>Fledged young</i>
S Strathclyde	18	7	11	9	2	6	28+
D&G	13	4	9	5	4	1	11+
Total	31	11	20	14	6	7	39+

Minimum overall productivity = 1.25 fledged young/occupied territory; 2.78 fledged young/successful nest.

Tree nests n = 9; successful n = 6 (66%); average known brood = 2.5 (n=6)

Ground nests n = 11; successful n = 8 (72%); average known brood = 3.28 (n = 7)

Where outcome precisely known productivity = 1.77 fledged young per occupied territory (n = 22).

Forest edge sites

The above data includes sampling of the forest edge Merlin sites discovered in 1993/94. A sample of 19 forest edge sites occupied in 1993 and 1994 were checked for occupation.

10 out of 19 sites were occupied, at least early in season (April/May). Outcome was known at 6 of these sites (3 successful, 3 failed) and unknown at the other 4.

Hen Harriers

In South Strathclyde 30 occupied territories produced 24 nests with eggs; 10 nests succeeded, producing 40+ young (av brood 3.6, productivity 1.33 fledged young per occupied territory). Human interference was known or strongly suspected in 13 failed attempts.

Hen Harriers were seen in an additional 4 locations in S Strathclyde but with no proof of breeding.

In Dumfries and Galloway, 20 occupied territories produced 19 nests with eggs; 15 nests succeeded, producing 49 young (av brood 3.26, productivity 2.45 fledged young per occupied territory). Human interference was known in 2 failed attempts.

Totals for the South West are, therefore: 50 occupied territories, 43 nests with eggs, 25 successful nests, 89 young produced (av brood 3.43, productivity 1.78 fledged young per occupied territory).

Peregrine

Peregrines in SW Scotland had another very productive year.

<i>Region</i>	<i>Occupied territory</i>	<i>Eggs proved</i>	<i>Success nests</i>	<i>Failed nests (robbed)</i>	<i>Outcome unknown (not checked)</i>	<i>Fledged young</i>
S Strathclyde coast	7	7	6	1	1 (1)	12+
S Strathclyde inland	18	16	7	10 (9)	4(3)	17+
Total	25	23	13	11 (9)	5(4)	29+
Dumf & Gall coast	17	9	9	3	7 (2)	17+
Dumf & Gall inland	57	45	32	23 (7)	4(3)	75+
Total	74	54	41	26(7)	11(5)	92+
SW Scotland total	99	77	54	37(16)	16(9)	121
<i>1994 total</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>26(13)</i>	<i>9(7)</i>	<i>121/124+</i>

Productivity (min. fledged young/occupied territory):

S Strathclyde coast = 1.71; inland = 0.94; Strathclyde overall = 1.16

Dumfries and Galloway coast = 1.00; inland = 1.32; Dumfries/Galloway overall = 1.24

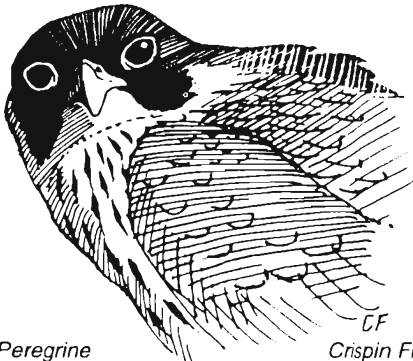
Overall productivity for SW Scotland = 1.22 fledged young/occupied territory

Productivity for nests where outcomes precisely known

S Strathclyde inland = 1.0 n=16
 S Strathclyde coast = 1.83 n=6
 Total = 1.23 n=22

Dumfries and Galloway inland 1.20 n=50
 Dumfries and Galloway coast 1.40 n=10
 Total 1.23 n=60

Overall productivity (where outcomes known) = 1.23 fledged young/occupied territory (n=82)
 (This compares with 1.27 in 1994.)



Peregrine

Crispin Fisher

The SW Scotland data was obtained by the following Dumfries & Galloway and S Strathclyde RSG workers:

John Adair, Jim Barclay, Jim Brown, Ken Bruce, Chris Cameron, Peter Dale, Andy Dickson, Bert Dickson, Richard Gladwell, Ronnie Graham, Charlie Hall, Ray Hawley, Angus Hogg, Keith Kirk, Ian Miller, Duncan Orr-Ewing, Charles E Park, Steve Redpath, Gordon Riddle, Chris Rollie, Dick Roxburgh, Geoff Shaw, Geoff Sheppard, Bob Stakim, Gary Tait and Gina Young

Lothian & Borders RSG

Peregrine

High site occupancy and productivity continue to be a feature of Southeast Scotland's Peregrines. Eightynine chicks fledged from 30 successful pairs, an average of 2.97 per successful pair. A further 7 pairs failed due to natural causes and 12 pairs failed in circumstances suggesting deliberate human persecution. This was, nevertheless, the most productive year on record with 8 more birds fledging than in 1994.

George Carse

Goshawk

Excluding Forest Enterprise land, 14 nest sites were monitored, 3 more than 1994.

The 6 nests found at the egg stage produced 20 young from 23 eggs. The 4 nests found after hatching produced 12 young. At 2 sites the nest was not found. Two pairs failed before laying.

No nest robberies or persecution incidents were recorded but human interference with this species is still widely suspected. What happens to the Goshawks after they have left the nest area is anybody's guess.

There were several reports of sightings throughout the Lothian & Borders RSG area so there may be more nests to be found. The Berwickshire, East Lothian and West Lothian area is of particular interest with sightings in 1994 & 1995.

Malcolm Henderson

Merlin

Weather conditions during the 1995 breeding season were favourable, particularly during the crucial incubation and small young period, when there was a prolonged dry and settled spell. Occupation levels were generally quite good and a high proportion of occupied sites successfully raised young. Within the Lammermuirs, and probably in most of the other areas monitored, this was one of the most successful years since the study began.

Lammermuir Hills

All known sites were monitored. A total of 17 showed some early signs of occupation. At 13 of these eggs were laid with the others failing before or just after laying. For only the second time since this study began in 1984 all located nests successfully hatched some young. Two nests subsequently failed when the young were quite small. Predation was assumed in both cases but with no evidence of the species responsible. The other 11 nests produced 42 young to ringing age from 48+ eggs (4 of these nests were located at the small young stage).

Moorfoot Hills

At least 11 pairs occupied sites although 2 either never laid or failed soon after laying. Six nests were located, one not until the young stage. At least 9 young fledged from the other 3 nests. One of these was thought to be a relay following an early failure at an alternative site. From the 9 nests, 34+ young are thought to have fledged.

Pentland Hills

Unfortunately, coverage was not as extensive as usual and most sites were not visited until late in the season. Nevertheless, these late visits suggest that several pairs attempted to breed this year. Fledged young were detected

at 3 sites and signs of occupation were found at 3 others. In addition, single birds were reported from several other areas.

South of Tweed

Areas searched in 1994 were revisited plus additional suitable habitat. Two nests succeeded, one a new site, and produced 9 young. At least 7 other pairs were in occupation early on, 2 of which remained on territory until after mid May, but either did not lay or probably failed soon after.

Alan Heavisides



Golden Eagle

Mike Ashley

Tayside RSG breeding data

	<i>Sites checked</i>	<i>Sites occupied</i>	<i>Sites laid</i>	<i>Sites hatched</i>	<i>Sites fledged</i>	<i>No young fledged</i>	<i>No young per success</i>
Hen Harrier							
Perthshire		39			18	52	2.9
Angus		2	1(+1?)	1	1	3	3.0
Golden Eagle							
W of A9	16	16	2+	2+	2	4	2.0
E of A9	16	15	9	7	7	11	1.6
Total	32	31	11+	9+	9	15	
Osprey		34	25	21	20	34	1.7
Merlin							
Perthshire	58	35	28		11(+2?)	31	2.8+
Angus	21	13	10(+2?)		8	26	3.25
Total	79	48	38(+2)		19(+2)	57	
Peregrine							
W of A9	30	17			9	24	2.67
E of A9	16	12	9	5	5	12	2.4
Angus	38	24	13		9	20	2.2
Total	83	52			22	54	
Raven							
W of A9	18	17			9	24+	2.7+
E of A9	5	1(+1?)	1	1	1	2+	2.0+
Total	23	18(+1)			10	26+	

Tayside RSG

Golden Eagle

Breeding success was poorer in the west of the area 'as usual' with its wetter climate and poorer prey density. Immatures are still recorded trying to colonise managed grouse moor. An adult male was found shot in Glen Clova with 30 shot gun pellets in its body.

Keith Brockie

Merlin

Perthshire had one of its poorest years for a long time with only 11 pairs known to have fledged young. Merlins in Angus eventually produced a satisfactory 26 known fledged young. A cold snap in the second week of May seems to have held back a very promising season at the outset.

Ron Downing & Wendy Mattingley

Osprey

A Swedish-ringed male was found dead under wires at a new site. One eyrie was seen to fall out, killing one of 3 chicks. A new nest was put up within 3 hrs and the female was back brooding. Another nest slipped, with one egg smashed on the ground. Workers rebuilding this found 3 eggs caught up in the debris of the tree. These were replaced, and, amazingly, 2 chicks fledged. Elsewhere, another eyrie blew down, killing 2 large chicks. One long established pair had its clutch robbed in early

May, ending a 9 year run that had produced 19 chicks.

Keith Brockie & Bradley Yule

Peregrine

A poor season in the west of the area with snow lying on many ledges through March, and some possible human interference. In east Perthshire success was also fairly low, especially for high ground pairs, due to poor weather early on. Angus also had an overall poor season again with upland birds faring worst. A male bred in Glen Esk was found electrocuted under power lines at Pitlochry. A Glen Clova nestling was found long dead nearby in Glen Prosen.

Patrick Stirling-Aird, Keith Brockie & Ron Lawie

Hen Harrier

A very poor year in Perthshire with many birds missing, and a big drop east of the Tay. Decreases were particularly noticeable in the usually denser populated areas, with more males than females present. Many pairs failed at the egg stage, mainly through natural causes, though there were the usual examples of persecution. Workers on the RSPB's survey of waders on grouse moors sighted harriers in the regular areas, but there were only 5 sightings in Angus.

Bruce Anderson



Male Hen Harrier

Mike Ashley

Scottish Ospreys

Ninety-nine nests were known to be occupied by pairs in 1994, which is 4 more than in 1993; 5 further traditional eyries had single birds present for at least short periods and several other sites were visited for single days. Three further pairs were seen but their nests were not located; to keep records comparable over the years, these are not included in the official total. If they were then the total would be 102 pairs. The Scottish population is now undoubtedly over 100 pairs, and it is now getting difficult to locate every pair each spring.

The spring weather was not particularly good in 1995. It was another colder than normal spring which delayed many individuals. There also appeared to be a shortage of new breeders early in the the season. Late May and early June were also poor with cold winds and rain at hatching time. The rest of the summer was very hot and dry.

Eggs were laid in 92 nests which is an increase of 9 on last year. Particularly distressing was a resurgence of egg stealing with a total of 6 clutches being illegally taken by egg thieves. Of special significance was the nest of a Scandinavian ringed female breeding for the first time; if her eggs had not be stolen by she could have contributed some new genes to the Scottish Osprey population. We hope she returns next summer and rears young.

Nine nests failed with eggs and a further 4 pairs failed before fledging. Several nest failures were due to strong winds. Others failed at hatching time due to bad weather while one nest was unfortunately disturbed by tree fellers. There were 3 cases of pairs being helped by the immediate provision of artificial nests.

In total 73 pairs reared a total of 144 young,



Male Osprey carrying a Trout to the female
Don Smith

which is 4 more pairs than last year but 2 chicks less. The over all production of young from the known Scottish population was 1.45 young per nest occupied by a pair; 1.57 young per pair laying eggs. Mean brood size was 1.92

**Roger Broad, Keith Brockie,
Colin Croke, Roy Dennis & Ian Francis**

The home life of the Peregrine and the Raven

March 21 I watched a pair of Ravens refurbish last year's nest.

March 31 I returned for an egg count and the female Raven flew from a fully lined nest with no eggs.

April 15 On the way to the Peregrine site 100 metres beyond, I checked the Raven again. To my disbelief there was no sign of the nest! My first thought was human persecution, although the birds were still there. I carried on to check the Peregrine. The Ravens followed and had their usual interactions with the Peregrine. This being a very public site, I left quickly, happy that the Peregrine was there.

April 25 The Ravens were present still but this time no Peregrines. I thought the falcon's eggs had been robbed as usual and did not bother checking the scrape. I turned my attentions to the Ravens, and began to wonder if they could have moved their nest, especially given how well the site had been cleared. Surely no human would have been so meticulous. No vestige of the nest remained.

May 15 En route to a Hen Harrier site on a nearby grouse moor, the Ravens were again in the area; this time they were very noisy. From a good viewing point, using the telescope, I could see at least 3 young in a large nest tucked in at the former Peregrine ledge. This confirmed my suspicion that the Ravens had indeed dismantled their nest, stick by stick, to rebuild it on the Peregrine ledge.

May 17 I found the Peregrine with eggs on a small site a mile away
Has anyone had a similar experience?

Ian Miller

The status of the Golden Eagle in Britain in 1992

This work has been published since the last Round Up. Since RSG workers played such a vital part in collecting the data it is thought appropriate to publish this short summary which is taken with kind permission from the BTO from Rhys Green's paper published in Bird Study (1996) 43: 20-27

A survey of Golden Eagles was carried out in 1992 which, as far as possible, repeated that of 1982-83. In total, 422 pairs were located, 0.5% fewer than in 1982-83. However, changes between 1982-83 and 1992 in the number of pairs in 7 geographical regions varied between a 27% decline (from 22 pairs to 16) and a 28% increase (from 53 pairs to 68). The mean number of young reared per



Golden Eagle

Bob Lambie

pair in 1992 was 0.32. There was no significant variation in breeding success between regions. Breeding success was lower in 1992 than in 1982 in 6 of the 7 regions. The proportion of 10-km National Grid squares which held pairs of Golden Eagles was positively correlated with the proportion of upland habitats within them, but there was also substantial geographical variation in population density, expressed as pairs per 100 km² of upland. Some predominantly upland areas held no Golden Eagles whereas the areas with the highest densities, which were in western Scotland, held up to about 4 pairs per 100 km² of upland.

Piracy on Short-eared Owls by Carrion Crow

On 19 November 1995, I was doing a Hen Harrier roost watch high on a hillside. The area was partly young forestry and open hill. From where I was sitting I had an excellent view of the surroundings. On scanning the area with binoculars, I could pick out 5 hunting Shorties. The Owls had also been here in good numbers on my first visit of the winter, in early October. A check of Short-tailed Voles then had shown numbers to be very high. I was surprised, as this was only the second winter after they had crashed. Another look over the settling area showed a couple of Carrion Crows hanging about doing nothing in particular.

The nearest hunting Shortie to where I was sitting made a kill and lifted into the air carrying a Vole in its talons. One of the Crows got up and headed straight for the Owl, chasing it round behind me and out of sight. Almost immediately, an Owl was heading back, flying fairly high with no sign of any Vole. I couldn't be absolutely sure, but I took it to be the same bird. It began to hunt the same local area suggesting that it was the same bird. I had noticed that they appeared to have their own small territories, which were defended against other Owls. Even though I didn't witness it, I was fairly sure the Crow had robbed the Owl of its Vole.

A month later, on 28 December, I visited the area with 2 companions. There had been heavy snow falls and only the very tops of the vegetation were showing through. At 11.10am whilst walking up the forest road we could see 3 hunting Shorties. The birds must have been under pressure to be out at that time of day. Next we spotted a Shortie flying our way carrying prey and chased by a Crow. The Crow was flying under the Owl and was about a metre away when the Owl dropped the

Vole. What happened next would put most harriers to shame. The Crow caught the vole. The timing was perfect, as if it had been rehearsed over and over.

On 21 January I was again down that way. This time I was on the other side of the hill, heading towards the roost. I spotted a Crow flying fast and direct above the young trees and sure enough there was a Shortie carrying a Vole in its talons. Again the Owl put up no fight and released the vole, which again was expertly caught in the crow's bill. I can remember thinking to myself, "Is this one individual bird, or are they all at it". I didn't have long to wait till I got the answer. An hour later, at about 3.50pm, I could see a Shortie carrying prey, this time chased not by one, but 2 Crows. The difference was that this Shortie had no intention of giving up the Vole without a fight. Finally, after relentless pressure from both Crows which were competing with one another, the Owl let go. This time it was a bit messy and only after a quick adjustment was the vole caught. Finally, the successful crow was now being chased by the other. I was never sure of the outcome. The birds were flying away from me at speed, twisting and turning.

I was surprised how easily 2 of the Owls gave up. It might be that with Voles being so plentiful it wasn't worth the hassle. I got the impression that, if only the Owls didn't have the habit of lifting up into the air after making a kill, piracy by Crows could have been avoided.

A search of the literature showed that piracy by other raptors was fairly well documented, but I could find no instances of Carrion Crows being involved.

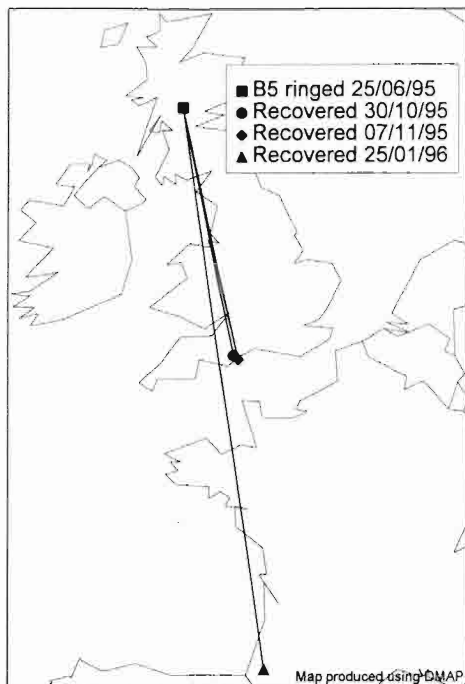
Richard Gladwell

Fellow travellers

A brood of 5 Merlins ringed at a site in West Perthshire on 25 June 1995 has provided 3 recoveries within the first winter. Two, a male and a female, were both found dead near Wareham, Dorset, the male on 7 November (finding details: dead, not fresh) and the female on 30 October distances of 644km and 655km respectively, the directions taken being 169° and 168°. These circumstances suggest that the 2 siblings had travelled in company.

Amazingly, a second female was "taken by a cat" near Luçon, Vendée, France on 24 January 1996, having travelled 1121km in a direction of, again, 169°. Had all 3, or all 5, kept company on their southward migration, these 3 falling by the wayside? Or was it just coincidence?

Euan Cameron



Breeding Short-eared Owls

Jim Young

Persecution issues

Larsen Traps

The introduction of the Larsen Cage Trap in 1990/91 for the capture of Carrion Crows and Magpies was seen as a breakthrough by game shooting interests. Reports of their effectiveness in catching territorial birds in spring were widespread and they have now become a standard item of gamekeepers' equipment.

This has had several effects on the positive side. Raptor workers have been told by keepers that the Larson has ended their involvement with poisoning. It is possible that the recent spread of Buzzards in east and south Scotland in part reflects a drop in widespread poisoning. In many areas, the introduction of these traps coincided with the start of the increase in Buzzards .

Interference with these traps, usually by release of decoy Crows, is therefore not likely to be helpful where illegal alternatives have only very recently been abandoned. Naive members of the public usually think they have discovered an illegal trap when they first encounter a Larsen . They then phone the RSPB or the Police and are educated into the world of legitimate Crow control!

On the negative side, the deliberate abuse of Larsens by converting them into raptor traps has been observed throughout the UK. Scotland has not escaped this phenomenon. Using Pigeons as bait, the similarity between these traps and traditional hawk traps is obvious.

Even with legitimate decoy species, (Crows and Magpies) in the trap, raptors can be caught. During the initial experiments on Salisbury Plain carried out by the Game Conservancy 12 Buzzards, 15 Kestrels, 3

Sparrowhawks and 16 Tawny Owls were trapped. Admittedly, this was from a total of over 10,000 captures, but the author has been told of areas in Scotland where Buzzards are regularly caught, released and trapped again! This also applies to Larsens without live decoys, but baited with Rabbit meat or eggs in the effort to catch the decoy Crow.

Due to an oversight by the government, the first Open General Licences needed to legitimise the use of live decoy birds in a confined space (Section 8, Wildlife and Countryside Act) contained the full "pest list" from the Act. It was, of course, a nonsense and a dangerous one for birds of prey, for the list to include Feral and Woodpigeons. The inclusion of House Sparrow reinforced this, as the typical mesh size of a Larsen would allow them to fly straight out!

It is worth remembering that the experiments at Salisbury Plain, which led to the granting of the licence were with regard to **territorial** species: Carrion Crows and Magpies.

It took over 2 years of work by the RSPB and the licensing section of SNH to amend this badly drafted licence. The licence must be reissued separately each year in Scotland, England and Wales. The text of the 1996 Scottish Licence is given below. In amending the Licence the opportunity was also taken to protect any accidentally trapped nontarget species by the addition of a condition stating that such birds should be released **immediately**. This ended the dubious legitimacy of claims that pigeons "flew in by themselves and were left there to protect them from the weather/let them recover from exhaustion etc. etc!"

It can be seen that the decoy species list still includes Rook and Jackdaw. This was a disappointment to some who felt there is little

possibility of the Larsen being effective against these nonterritorial, social birds.

Finally, an opportunity was also missed in not setting a close season. Most illegal usage of these traps takes place in summer and autumn, connected to attempts to trap raptors near Pheasant release pens. This is of course, well after the season of Corvid territoriality. What excuse can there be for any responsible vermin controller putting out a Larson Trap at this time? If abuses continue, this suggestion may have to be put forward again.

The following guidelines are suggested in dealing with Larsen Traps

1 Do not interfere with legitimately set Larsen Traps.

2 The placing of any non Corvid species in the closed, decoy section of a Larsen Trap is an offence. If you find such a situation, report it immediately to the Police (preferably your local Wildlife Liaison Officer, see list in this report) and/or RSPB Investigations Section at 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.

3 If you find a trapped raptor caught by a non Corvid decoy, **do not release these birds until the evidence is properly recorded unless you are in a very remote area where any follow up will take hours and the bird's welfare is at stake. Always take photographs if possible and try to find a witness.**

The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department Rural Affairs and Natural Heritage Division

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Licence to allow the keeping of birds in certain cage traps for pest control purposes.

This licence, granted under Section 16(1) (c), (d) and (k) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 by the Secretary of State for Scotland after consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage, is valid in Scotland unless previously revoked, until 31 December 1997, being satisfied that there is no other satisfactory solution hereby authorises, subject to the conditions set out below, any authorised person to keep or confine any bird in a Larsen cage trap, the dimensions of which do not satisfy the requirements of section 8(1) of the Act, for the purpose of conserving wild birds, protecting any collection of wild birds and preventing serious damage to livestock, crops, vegetables, fruit, growing timbers or fisheries.

Conditions

1 No bird other than a species included in the following list may be kept or confined in a Larsen cage trap as a decoy:-

Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		

2 Any bird not included in the Annex to this licence which may become confined in a Larsen cage trap must be released immediately on being found

3 Any Larsen cage trap which contains as a decoy a live bird, must be inspected on at least one occasion in any 24 hour period

4 The decoy bird must be provided with adequate food, water, shelter and a perch for the entire period during which it is used.

Definitions

5 In this licence "authorised person" has the same meaning as in Section 27 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

6 "Larsen cage trap" means a cage trap which has a closed compartment for confining a live bird as a decoy and a spring activated trap door which is either top or side mounted.

Crow funnel trap problems

During January 1996 the death of a young ringed Golden Eagle in a funnel Crow cage brought this chronic problem to prominence. The problem of both deliberate and neglectful killing of species including Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Kestrel and Raven has been well known to raptor workers and RSPB Investigators. The fact that this particular bird had only fledged after a massive effort by volunteers working with Forest Enterprise - protecting its nest from egg thieves - made this death doubly significant.

In an attempt to quantify the problem, Raptor Group members have been asked to supply details, including photographs, of trapped protected birds to RSPB Investigations section.

Widespread publicity of this incident was followed up with an approach by RSPB and SOAEFD with recommendations for legal restrictions on design and use of these traps. The outcome of this approach is eagerly awaited. Suggestions to SOAEFD include a

legally defined requirement for a 24 hours minimum period between checks of set traps; that traps should be padlocked open when not in use; that traps should have standardised dimensions which would exclude eagles. This last suggestion will no doubt need a review of the effectiveness of the present wide variety of designs in this totally unregulated area.

In order to implement such ideas an alteration of the present Open General Licence covering legal control of the former "pest list" would be required, or, more effectively, a separate licence to cover Funnel Traps as with the present Larsen Trap licence.

With the suggested improvements, the deliberate trapping and/or gross neglect which kills protected species in these traps would become a clear cut legal matter. The debate in itself should lead to better procedures and save birds from a very unpleasant and totally unnecessary death.

Thanks to all RSG workers who have supplied photographs. More are still needed.

Dave Dick



*Larsen trap
Ken Slater*

Police Wildlife Liaison Officers

- Central** Insp Ian Cameron, Police HQ,
Randolphfield, Stirling FK8 2HD
01786 456000
- Dumf & Gall** Sgt Graham Young, 44 High St,
Annan DG12 6AJ 01461 202813
Sgt J McColm, Stranraer Police
Office, Stranraer DG9 8EG
01776 702112
- Fife** PC Ronnie Morris, Kirkcaldy
Police Station, St Brycedale Ave,
Kirkcaldy KY1 1EV 01592 418700
- Grampian** Insp John Sellar, The Police
Station, High St, Inverurie AB51
9QS 01467 620222
Sgt Roddy MacInnes, Police
Station, Banchory, Kincardine
AB31 3RP 01330 822252
- Loth & Bord** Sgt Brian Robertson, Dalkeith
Police Station, Newbattle Rd
Dalkeith EH22 3AX
0131 660 2855
Sgt Malcolm Henderson, G
Division, Kelso Police Station
Kelso TD5 7AH 01573 223434
- Northern** PC Ronald Dempster, Alness
Police Station, Obsdale Rd
Alness, Easter Ross IV17 0TU
01349 882222
- North Isles & North coast** PC David Dawson, St Margaret's
Hope, Orkney KW17 2TN
0185 683529
- Strathclyde** PC Norman Stewart, Glasgow
Airport Police Office, St Andrew
Dr, Paisley PA3 2ST
0141 848 4515
PC Ronnie Sewell, East King St,
Helensburgh G84 7RE
01436 672141

- Tayside (West)** Insp T Smith, Cumbernauld
Police Station, South Muirhead
Rd.Cumbernauld G67 1AX
01236 736085
Insp Willie Allan, 1 King St, Ayr
KA8 0BU 01292 266966
- Insp Alan Stewart, Kinross
Police Station, High St, Kinross
KY13 7AW 01577 863571
PC Scott McKinlay, Kinross (as
above)
PC Robert Noble, Pitlochry Police
Station, 14 Atholl Rd, Pitlochry
PH16 5BX 01796 472222
PC Donald Campbell, Crieff
Police Station, King St, Crieff PH7
3HA 017654 652247
PC Graham Jack, Coupar Angus
Police Station, Blairgowrie Rd.
Coupar Angus PH13 9AT
01828 627343
PC Richard McCorquodale,
Perth Police Station, Barrack St
Perth PH1 5SF 01738 621141
PC Bruce Sime, Abernethy Police
Station, Main St, Abemethy PH2
01738 850222
Sgt Douglas Robson, The Police
Office, Gravesend, Arbroath
DD11 1HT 01241 872222
PC John Robertson, Arbroath:
Police Station (as above)
PC Ian Hutchison, Forfar Police
Station, West High St, Forfar DD8
1BP 01307 302200
PC Harvey Birse, Forfar Police
Station (as above)
PC Neil Coupar, Birkhill/Muirhead
Police Station, Liff Rd. Muirhead,
Angus DD2 5QF 01382 580214
PC Dougal Ogilvie, Edzell Police
Station, Dunlappie Rd, Edzell
Angus DD9 7UB 01356 648222



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