

Motion S5M-08342 Mairi Gougeon: Heads Up for Harriers Project and the Role of Species Champions

Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) strongly supports Mairi Gougeon's work as the Hen Harrier species champion, commends her balanced approach and welcomes this motion.

SLE has been closely involved as a partner in the PAWS/SNH Heads Up For Harriers project (HUFH) since it started three years ago. It has recently [published results for 2017](#).

The objective of the HUFH has been to [raise awareness](#) and, through use of nest cameras, to find out more about why nests fail. All nest failures recorded on the HUFH cameras to date have been due to natural causes (weather etc) or fox predation.

We believe the project is important, not only as a focus for rebuilding the Scottish Hen Harrier population, but also for developing cooperation between land managers and raptor enthusiasts. The relationships between estate staff and the two Hen Harrier experts employed by SNH to operate nest cameras have been very good. HUFH is one of the very few collaborative projects in this area and must continue to be supported.

Along with other project partners, SLE has devoted considerable effort to explaining the project to members and will continue to try and draw in new participants. This has resulted in an increase from 5 estates volunteering in 2015 to a total of 21 in 2017. Up to two thirds of the estates where cameras were installed have been driven grouse moors, indicating a strong take-up where the issue of Hen Harrier decline is most relevant.

In respect of the national Hen Harrier population, the 2016 survey showed a 9% decline since 2010, although this was considered to be non-significant, so the species in Scotland is not facing extinction. Hen Harrier breeding fluctuates naturally and 2016 was a poor year – had the survey been carried out in a very good year such as 2014, the national result may have been different. The issue for the species is in parts of the country where there has been a marked decline in the last two decades, such as the east of Scotland. There has been a high concentration of estates volunteering to have cameras in Angus and North-East Scotland (12 in 2017). There was one nest on a grouse moor in the Angus Glens in 2017, where a camera was set up, but the eggs were not successful.

Estates in Angus and South Deeside want to see Harriers back again, but as SNH point out in [their press release](#) it will take time for a critical mass of potential breeding birds to build up in the region after years of decline.

We call on all those in the sector and with an interest in this issue to work collaboratively to achieve positive results in supporting the Hen Harrier population in Scotland.

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