

PEAK DISTRICT BIRD OF PREY INITIATIVE- 2016 & 2017 REPORT

Project Overview

Five leading land management and conservation organisations in the Peak District National Park got together in 2011 to develop a 5-year initiative in a bid to try and boost birds of prey populations in the Dark Peak.

The organisations involved - the Moorland Association, the National Trust, Natural England, Peak District National Park Authority and RSPB - set five-year targets for healthy sustainable breeding populations of three target species- Merlin, Peregrine Falcon and Short-eared Owl- based on population levels in the 1990s, and from 2016 extended to include Hen Harrier and Goshawk. **What criteria was used to base population levels on 1990 figures (was this when various Raptor Monitors started operating? Obviously at a Raptor high level so in essence setting targets at that height are difficult to achieve) Visitor numbers/land/farming use will have changed since then.**

Together the five organisations have funded an independent field worker (Jamie Horner) to help ascertain accurate breeding data and to facilitate co-operation between raptor workers and shooting interests. **Not sure how much input has been made on the ground, as you know I haven't met Jamie Horner. Talking at a meeting and agreeing on actions doesn't seem to filter down to the people on the ground?**

The two raptor groups in the Peak District work together to monitor and record the breeding success of raptors in the Peak District. The Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group (PDRM) and South Peak Raptor Study Group (SPRSG) are both committed to offering Jamie (and the five funding organisations listed above) their full support and co-operation in trying to achieve the described aims and objectives. **Would totally disagree with "full support and cooperation", hidden agenda wit ██████████ raptor worker █████ do not let the keepers know what is going on – important to know for Health and Safety as well as wasted time pursuing predators in springtime if raptor workers are on the ground without letting us know. FC have also had breaching conditions too. Unfortunately Raptor workers have a historical dislike of 'keepers (should impartial "ringers" be used instead – BTO?)**

The survey methods being used are in line with the methods documented in Raptors: A field guide for surveys and monitoring, Jon Hardey, Humphrey Crick, Chris Wernham, Helen Riley, Brian Etheridge and Des Thompson- Section 2.2.1 Counts of occupied home ranges and active nests.

Overview of Results

It is widely agreed that in terms of increased raptor populations in the Dark Peak, the Peak District Bird of Prey Initiative 2012-2015 failed to meet its targets. **Who was consulted on targets? Which 'keepers/land managers, historical nest sites (realistically disturbance, land use, habitat change and along with that the attractiveness for nesting). So targets not met on non-shooting moorland either (goes back to what 'keepers keep saying, persecution is only one factor in failed nesting attempts)**

One area where the Initiative has made improvements is in the relationships between raptor fieldworkers and gamekeepers. However, this fragile relationship is currently under pressure with continued evidence of raptor persecution incidents, and a lack of progress with regards to increasing successful breeding populations of the target species. **I don't see any improvements in relationships and whilst spurious allegations and hearsay are made never will. Are the Raptor Fieldworkers**

disgusted (and vocal) at the failure at the [REDACTED] Peregrine nest? Failed Raven nest on Eastern Moors?

Had the Initiative shown any reasonable success in boosting bird of prey populations, it could have been upheld as an example of how raptor conservation and shooting interests could work together to the benefit of all parties. Unfortunately, this has not been demonstrated to date. **Birds fail to nest for a multitude of reasons, look at the success of Kestrel and Barn Owl on moorland and margins this year (have Barn Owls and Kestrel done as well on non kept areas with an abundance of predators/lack of habitat management?) No criticism for failure at [REDACTED] or Ravens on Eastern Moors (would have been totally different if it was on a shooting estate)**

All the partners of 2011-15 Initiative agreed to continue the work in 2016 & 2017. It was agreed that the project should be widened to include the South West Peak District Area and to include Goshawk and Hen Harrier in the project objectives. No targets have been set for Goshawk or Hen Harrier. **Realistic targets only with regard to the level of visitor numbers, increase in extreme sports (free climbing and mountain biking –day/night)**

With the wider scope, the Initiative needs to reconsider the initial agreed targets for the species and the revised area now being monitored. This should include two additional Peregrine Falcon sites and five additional Merlin sites to remain consistent with previous years reporting. **Targets do need to be reconsidered (along with the national suggestion that England could carry 300 pairs of Hen Harrier? But at what cost to other species, livelihoods etc)**

Several proven and suspected persecution incidents have come to light since the 2015 project review and some areas have suffered a catastrophic failure of larger breeding raptors.

The very low numbers of larger raptors breeding successfully in the Dark Peak and surrounding area- in particular the lack of any successful breeding by Peregrines in the Dark Peak in 2017, the first time since they recolonised the area in 1984- continues to give real cause for concern. By comparison, we are offered an insight into what success could be witnessed by looking at the population growth and breeding success that species such as Peregrine, Goshawk and Buzzard achieve in the areas away from the Dark Peak. **I think its incorrect to compare other success areas side by side with the Peak District, and just presume that we too should have an increase of target species. The Peak District is unique and has its own unique factors which effect all bird populations on the ground.**

2016 SEASON- OVERVIEW

Species	Territories checked	Territories occupied by pairs	Territories occupied by single birds	Pairs known to have laid eggs	No. of pairs known to have fledged young	No. young fledged	Agreed Targets (based on figs. at SPA designation)
Peregrine	21	8	1	4	3	8	15 prs by 2015 (+2 SW Peak)

Short-eared Owl			Please see the species summary below				5-yr ave. 25 prs by 2015
Merlin	48	24	2	15	11	38	27 prs by 2013, 32 by 2015 (+5 SW Peak)
Goshawk	25	8	2	7	4	9	None set
Hen Harrier	Vast areas	0	Sporadic sightings of single birds	N/A	N/A	N/A	None set

2016 Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

Nine territories were found to be occupied, eight by pairs and one by at least a single bird.

Repeat visits found most of the unsuccessful territories had been vacated during the season.

Of the eight territories known to be occupied by pairs, four pairs are known to have laid eggs three of which were successful and fledged a total of eight young. At the fourth site the eggs or small young were missing from the scrape with the reason for failure unknown. However, there were a large number of reported thefts of peregrine falcon eggs/small young elsewhere in the North of England in 2016. The lack of evidence of natural loss leads to the suspicion that this nesting attempt may have suffered the same fate. **Well done for mentioning theft of eggs/young by non shooting individuals**

The addition of the South West Peak District to the project area resulted in one additional successful Peregrine nesting attempt at the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust site, the Roaches. **Out of interest what is the history on the [REDACTED] Peregrine – just because they are now included in the report, doesn't mean that they haven't nested successfully in the past years with no intrusive monitoring methods.**

2016 Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)

No Short-eared Owls were recorded breeding in the Peak District in 2016, the weather and the suspected low vole productivity are thought to be the main reason behind the lack of breeding birds.

Several pairs were recorded displaying early in the season prior to the snow in March; after the cold spell, sporadic sightings of single birds were recorded. **Don't agree. Does that mean nothing at all bred on the unkept areas too? Eastern Moors? [REDACTED] Moors?**

2016 Merlin - (*Falco columbarius*)

The number of occupied territories continues to be stable at around twenty-four pairs. In 2016 there was a larger than usual disparity between the numbers of sites initially occupied and the number of

actual nesting attempts when compared to an average to the previous 4 years of the study. There were also several failures to report (see below). Productivity was lower in 2016, which we believe this was principally down to adverse weather at key stages of the breeding cycle.

The number of young per occupied site dropped from a project average of circa 2.3 to 1.6 in 2016. It is worth mentioning that the number of young per successful site remains good with an average 3.45 young fledging per successful nest.

2016 Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

Goshawks were recorded at ten sites, eight pairs and two sites with at least a single bird in occupation.

At least seven pairs were known to have laid eggs and behaviour suggested a further pair may have also laid eggs but the nest was not located before the birds disappeared.

Four Pairs were successful fledging nine young.

The remaining four pairs failed in circumstances unexplainable by natural occurrence with evidence of direct persecution at three sites and disappearance of the birds at the fourth.

2016 Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

Single birds were recorded on very few occasions during the early part of the season but there was no evidence of any birds pairing up. The number of reported sightings was much lower in 2016 than in previous years.

The picture for the whole of England was of a very poor breeding season with just three successful nests, none of which were on grouse moors.

2017 SEASON- OVERVIEW

Species	Territories checked	Territories occupied by pairs	Territories occupied by single birds	Pairs known to have laid eggs	No. of pairs known to have fledged young	No. young fledged	Agreed Targets (based on figs. at SPA designation)
Peregrine	23	8	1	4	0	0	15 prs by 2015 (+2 SW Peak)

Short-eared Owl			Please see the species summary below				5-yr ave. 25 prs by 2015
Merlin	48	23	2	19	14	50+	27 prs by 2013, 32 by 2015 (+5 SW Peak)
Goshawk	25	13	4	6	3	9	None set
Hen Harrier	Vast areas	0	Few sightings of single birds	ON/A	N/A	N/A	None set

2017 Peregrine Falcon

Eight territories were recorded to be occupied by pairs, a further site had a single bird in occupation.

Repeat visits found most of the territories were vacant or in some cases where pairs had previously consisted of two adult birds one of the pair had been replaced by an immature bird.

Of the eight territories known to be occupied by pairs, four pairs are known to have laid eggs, there were no successful breeding attempts recorded in the BOPI study area in 2017. This is the first year that Peregrines have not nested successfully in the Dark Peak since they first recolonised the area in 1984. No mention of the cooperation of ██████████ to try and produce a succesfull nest, and the, I believe, unwillingness of some raptor workers to cooperate?

The installation of a nest camera may have contributed to the lack of a successful outcome for the Peregrine nesting attempt at one site, as the camera was seen to be highly conspicuous. ██████████ What went wrong who was accountable? Press release from raptor workers at how horrified they are, and what they will do to prevent it happening again? (is there a history of persecution of ██████████ Peregrine, no shooting interest, so the reason for cameras was??? If other types of persecution/failure in the past, perhaps that's a good enough reason for failure elsewhere?)

2017 Short-eared Owl

Short-eared Owl activity was very limited in 2017, despite there being an apparent upturn in small mammal abundance (this may have come too late for many pairs). Other species that depend on small mammal prey (Long-eared Owl, Tawny Owl, Barn Owl and Kestrel) responded better to the reported increase in small mammal populations with a good breeding seasons recorded in many areas of the UK. They arrived in good numbers at end of March early April then appeared to dispersed – food availability? Does that mean nothing at all bred on the unkept areas too? Eastern Moors? ██████████ Moors?

Two pairs of Short-eared Owl were recorded breeding and birds were recorded at two other sites but breeding could not be proven. **I wholeheartedly believe more than 2, better cooperation with JH?**

2017 Merlin

The number of occupied Merlin territories remains stable.

The number of occupied sites recording a breeding attempt returned to a similar level to the rest of the study period (after a dip in 2016).

Productivity of successful nest sites also returned to the levels in line with the 2012-2015 average in 2017 after suffering in 2016.

The number of young fledging per successful site remains good, with an average 3.57 young per successful nest.

As in 2014, 2015 and 2016 there was no proven breeding for the Eastern Moors area. Various theories for the lack of breeding Merlin in these areas have been discussed and all are worthy of further investigation. However, it is likely that multiple factors have contributed to their failure to breed successfully in recent years. To better understand the issues a funded scientific study may well be required. Perhaps more worrying is that in the last few years pairs of birds do not appear to be returning to this area to enable them to breed. **But Merlin nests have been successful on 'keepered moors. So to clarify, NO indication of actual reasons for failure, and NO criticism made to Eastern Moors, smacks of a case of double standards being applied.**

2017 Goshawk

Goshawk were recorded at seventeen sites, thirteen pairs and four sites where a single bird was in occupation.

Six pairs were known to have laid eggs and three pairs were successful fledging nine young. Three nests failed, two with the apparent loss of one of the adult birds.

2017 Hen Harrier

Given the continued low number of successfully breeding Hen Harrier in England, it is unsurprising that we can only report a handful of Hen Harrier sightings in the study area in 2017 breeding season. Sightings included a late sky-dancing grey male in the north of the study area. **Migratory bird, wasn't only shooting estates they didn't choose to nest on, nothing on Wildlife Trust's ground either etc despite a large wintering roost a [REDACTED] WHY?**

RECORDED PERSECUTION AND OTHER INCIDENTS SINCE THE 2015 REVIEW

Reported Incidents

- **Osprey** found grounded, died before being recovered, injuries consistent with being caught in an illegally set trap. **Inconclusive – headline grabbing reporting and also wounds consistent with wire strike.**

- **Common Buzzard** found dead with visual damage, sent for x-ray, contained a large amount of lead shot (heavy gauge cartridge used). **Could have carried shot from a large distance/number of miles before succumbing to wounds. Not necessarily grouse moor interest**
- **Goshawk** nest containing eggs failed, a shotgun cartridge was discovered under the nest and damaged Goshawk feathers close by (damage indicating that the bird had been shot).
- RSPB reported one failed **Goshawk** nest containing eggs in 2015, with video/audio evidence of persecution at night.
- **Peregrine** found injured in the SW Peak (later died), x-ray by vet proved bird was shot.
- Tarras, a young female **Hen Harrier** tagged as part of the Langholm study in Scotland, recorded her last known fix in the northern part of the study area.
- **Merlin** young missing from nest; no evidence of predation. Nest was OK one week earlier. **Credentials of the person interpreting the predation signs and assumptions**

Other Incidents

- **Goshawk** site failed despite a pair of birds seen displaying and male carrying food into a wood indicating a probable breeding attempt, nest not located. Birds disappeared. **Nest not located by raptor workers, so presume they looked hard, therefore possible inevitable disturbance by them causing pair to abandon?**
- **Goshawk** nest containing eggs failed, extensive camp built nearby. **Increase levels of extreme sports, wild camping**
- **Merlin** eggs/small young disappeared, evidence of nest location being marked by persons unknown for ease of relocating. **Falconry interest?**
- **Merlin** pair (adult birds) failed without explanation after laying eggs, birds no longer in attendance. **Without explanation? So as likely to be disturbance increase in Buzzard/Raven interaction?**
- **Merlin** several pairs disappeared from occupied sites pre-laying, despite breeding behaviour being recorded. **As above**
- **Peregrine** failed nesting attempt West Yorkshire, scrape empty despite female being observed brooding and turning eggs for over 10 days.
- Complete breeding failure of **Peregrine Falcon** in the Dark Peak in 2017. **Despite sterling work by [REDACTED] to help their nest to be successful.**
- **Failure in SW Peak due to camera installation incompetence?**

In addition a number of other incidents, such as publicly released footage allegedly of a gamekeeper with a decoy raptor on National Trust land, attracted significant media and/or social media attention. **Due to the attractiveness of social media/groups intent on banning DGS, this story was made to look very suspicious, when in actual fact what was recorded was a totally legal form of corvid control, brought about through a change from other traditional legal methods of predator control due to trap tampering and vandalism ie multi-catch corvid cages.**

NB These are collated from raptor groups' data and publicly available press releases. There may well be ongoing investigations from either/both the RSPB and Derbyshire Police. **Publicly available press releases? Such as Raptor Persecution/Avery Blog etc???**

There seems very limited sharing of information on reported nest success/failure (only when report comes out) is there a reason for this?

Why aren't the Peregrines nestin [REDACTED] included in the report (why divide the Peak District?), SW Peak (good nesting sites, abundant food)

Some keepers would I believe show evidence of eggs/fledging but are not keen on Raptor Workers coming out/looking about purely because of historical inputs/differences/allegations/mud slinging

Think Amanda mentioned in meeting that the Raptor Workers aren't driven by photographing/ringing their finds – not sure that the 'keepers would agree on this (some seem obsessed with ringing – why?)

Is there a need to ring birds? Failure of [REDACTED] Peregrine due to disturbance from camera (if not a historically highly persecuted nest site – no shooting interest- why the need for a camera?)

Keepers have observed a change in Buzzard hunting techniques, more attempted/ real strikes at birds, this will, from our observations, impact on grouse, waders, and lesser sized raptors (Merlin and SEO, maybe a factor for Merlin failure on Eastern Moors?)

What's happening on the 22,000 acres of moorland not shot over, or is it just the 'keepered estates that the BOPI is interested in (goes back to my voiced concerns that there is a hidden agenda to make out shooting estates have poor raptor/bird diversity – echoed by the likes of Avery etc and social media scare stories)

Hope my restrained points make it clear Amanda, what the 'keepers on the ground feel on the whole injustice and skewed feeling of this report, and why we would not be happy with its release.