

## **Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group**

**9 November 2017 11:00 am**

**British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)  
Marford Mill, Chester Road, Rossett, Wrexham LL12 0HL**

### **Attending:**

Supt. Chris Hankinson (Greater Manchester Police) - Chair  
Emma Deighton (Defra) - secretariat  
Emma Phillimore (Defra) (by phone)  
Dave Hunt (NE) (by phone)  
Martin Sims (NWCUC)  
Amanda Anderson (Moorland Association)  
Phillip Davies (CA)  
Stephen Downing (NERF)  
Adrian Shepherd (YDNPA)  
Glynn Evans (BASC)  
Ginny Swaile (NE)  
Kathleen Carroll (WG)  
Charles Nodder (NGO)  
Adrian Shepherd (YDNPA)  
Bob Elliot (RSPB) (by phone)  
Andrew Gillett (CLA)  
Christopher Graffius (BASC) (attended part of meeting)

### **1) Introductions and apologies – (Chair)**

### **2) Minutes and action points from the previous meeting (Chair)**

Previous minutes were agreed. Action updates:

**Action 7.2** – outstanding. BE will speak to the PAW Training & Conference Group to ask them to take forward work on publicity leaflet.

**Action 7.3 & 7.5** – in progress. Draft guidance being finalised by BE and MS detailing the process and responsibilities for evidence-gathering for incidents of suspected raptor persecution in England and Wales.

**Action 7.10** – completed. GS to represent NE at future meetings.

**Action 8.1-** completed. MS had re-sent DH the nest destruction data.

**Action 8.2** – outstanding. MS to circulate terms and conditions for the maps to group.

**Action 8.3** – completed. MS attempted but not able to find out what proportion of the poison surrenders in Scotland were on farmland as most were anonymous.

**Action 8.4** – completed. MS had discussed with NE producing an alternative version of the protocol to apply to hen harriers. SD suggested that sat-tagged Osprey should be

added to the list of species on the basis that they are vulnerable if they feed at fish farms. Details of all sat-tagged projects can be obtained from Jez Blackburn at the BTO.

A protocol for Hen Harriers already exists. MS suggested the group should consider whether Marsh Harriers and Montagu's Harriers should be subject to the same protocol as Hen Harriers in terms of post-mortem follow-up investigations. MS had discussed this with Stephen Murphy at Natural England, who was part of the Hen Harrier Action Plan. Stephen thought this was a good idea as the numbers involved are small and builds on the Scottish model. AA stressed that the protocol should ensure a consistent approach is taken regardless of the species and the important thing is that the landowner is aware of that process. The group agreed with including Marsh Harriers and Montagu's Harriers in the Hen Harrier protocol. This will be taken forward through the NWCUC.

BE explained that RSPB have not signed up to the Hen Harrier Action Plan nor the protocol and do not wish to do so.

Details about any discrepancies in the protocol would need to be taken forward with NWCUC. CH asked for a copy of the NE protocol to be circulated to the group. KC questioned whether the NE protocol extends into Wales or just covers England and SD agreed clarification on this point would be beneficial. CN questioned why the protocol should not be extended to apply to any tagged raptor, rather than just Harriers. CH said that it should focus on the most endangered birds in terms of numbers. CH suggested all members should read and digest the protocol to fully understand the commitment, check the wording and whether it applies to Wales. Then consider whether all tagged birds should be included.

**Action 9.1: GS to circulate the Hen Harrier protocol**

**Action 8.5** – completed. RSPB's response to Defra on the WIIS scheme had been circulated.

**Action 8.6** – completed. The Welsh pesticide disposal scheme poster had been circulated.

### **3) Raptor persecution maps**

DH gave a demonstration of the maps. ED advised that the Minister, Thérèse Coffey, will announce the publication of the maps at the Wildlife Law Enforcers' Conference on 25<sup>th</sup> November. The maps will go live on 15<sup>th</sup> December. ED will draft a press release on behalf of the group and circulate for all members to sign. CH emphasised the importance of collaboration regarding communications and that the next steps for the group would be to consider improvements to the maps and future iterations.

MS asked for comments on the Terms and Conditions which he had drafted in liaison with Natural England.

**Action 9.2: all to provide comments to MS asap on the T's and C's**

MS suggested that the 2016 data should be added to the maps shortly to replace the 2011 data. However, the data would first need sanitising. The group was happy with this proposal. BE added that there was still some disagreement from RSPB's perspective about the categorisation of crimes. NWCUC and RSPB will review the 2016 data. This will be an agenda item for the next meeting and CI Louise Hubble (new head of NWCUC) will

oversee the work going forward. DH confirmed that there would be no charge to update the map data.

**Action 9.3: RSPB and NWCU to review and sanitise the 2016 data for the maps.**

SD was concerned that the maps were problematic to use as it is difficult to extract the data from them. He added that there should be a link to the T's and C's on NWCU's website once they were published. CH agreed that the group should review the maps every six months to suggest any tweaks that are needed.

KC would ensure that the maps are prepared and published by the Welsh Government in line with England. The maps would have to be translated into Welsh and published in both languages in line with the Welsh Language Act requirements. KC and DH would liaise to ensure the GIS data is transferred correctly to the similar Welsh mapping system. CN emphasised the importance of ensuring the Welsh maps are identical to the English ones.

**4) RSPB Birdcrime Report 2016**

BE advised that the report had been received positively in general and that media reports regarding raptor persecution had been favourable. Criticisms had been from the NGO, the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association and the MA. BASC had been supportive of elements and their article in the Times was very welcome.

CN, AA and PD expressed their disappointment regarding the timing of the communications by RSPB and that the group had not been notified in advance of publication of the report. AA reiterated the difficulty of providing responses to press releases without prior sight of the report.

BE clarified that the report is online with it being released on the day. An embargoed press release was sent out to press contacts the day before (this essentially contained the main messages from the report). CH requested that there be an agenda item for the RPPDG meeting ahead of future Birdcrime report publications so that the group has opportunity to discuss how they can support them. CH also suggested that all RPPDG members should agree a press release and circulate to the group in advance of future publications.

CN raised a concern that the RSPB Birdcrime report undermines the credibility of the MAGIC maps. BE refuted this and explained that RSPB (and others) are able to produce independent reports as it sees fit; the RPPDG protocol states that. AA asked if the MAGIC maps and the RSPB Birdcrime report could be published in sync in the future. BE said that would not be possible. SD said the group should record all raptor crimes on the maps, i.e. egg thefts and attempted crimes should be included. SD said that the data is not complete and does not follow Home Office guidelines. In NERF's opinion the true statistics were being suppressed and there would be no progress with preventing raptor persecution if the true extent of the problem is not acknowledged.

CH acknowledged the progress made with publishing the maps and noted that ongoing debate was encouraging.

**5) Raptor guidance update (Martin Sims)**

MS had sent the drafted guidance to RSPB and had received feedback. MS had not progressed the work further due to other commitments.

## **6) NCWU and Scotland update (Martin Sims)**

MS advised that funding has been secured for the Golden Eagle release project in Scotland. The first birds will be released in 2019. A protocol for recovering dead birds is being drawn up. MS will share this with the group. GS advised that there had been little engagement with Natural England on this and that landowners would need to be made aware of the project. MS will raise this at the Scottish RPPDG meeting. CH asked for the golden eagle project to be added as a substantive item on the agenda for all meetings.

### **Action 9.4: MS to share the golden eagle recovery protocol with the group**

Two estates in Scotland have had their general licence withheld because of previous malpractice.

CI Louise Hubble will take over from MS as Head of the NWCU shortly and will attend future RPPDG meetings.

MS will be attending a meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December regarding raptors being taken from the nest to be sold on illegal markets overseas. APHA and UK Border Force will also be attending.

The Countryfile piece covering a bird nest-stealing case led to a lot of information being reported via Crimestoppers and had led to several arrests.

## **7) Hen Harrier Action Plan update (Ginny Swaile)**

A Hen Harrier “John” had disappeared in North Yorkshire. North Yorkshire Police had assisted by deploying a search team with the direction of Stephen Murphy at NE. There was no sign of John nor the satellite tag. NE were still assessing the application for brood management. The licence is expected to be approved when NE are confident that all outstanding questions regarding the licence have been addressed.

## **8) Update on WIIS Scheme (MS/ED)**

ED advised that the WIIS would be continuing and that ongoing discussions were happening between Defra and NWCU about the possibility of NWCU taking on delivery of WIIS. MS advised that he was meeting the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on 29<sup>th</sup> November to discuss further. BE was concerned that NWCU would not have capacity to undertake the scheme since much of the WIIS work is active pesticide monitoring/compliance rather than crime-related. This would be an agenda item for the next meeting.

## **9) Round table updates on recent activities**

NGO (CN): The process whereby NE licences were issued for lethal control of Buzzards to prevent damage to livestock worked more smoothly this year. NGO are keen to see NE's internal guidance note on licensing the lethal control of birds for conservation purposes. GS advised that it is internal guidance intended for NE staff. GS confirmed that this is not a new type of licence and individual licences have been issued in the past for conservation purposes involving species conflicts.

MA (AA): AA reported that there had been an increase in reports of raptors on the moors, including red kites and Marsh Harriers and that they are starting to have an impact. GS offered to speak further to AA about the issue.

YDNPA/NPE (AS): AS reported that there had been ongoing work with NE regarding Hen Harrier winter roost monitoring and nesting attempts in the YDNP. YDNPA is also working closely with the MA, NERF, RSPB and other NPAs & AONBs across the North of England. Northumberland NPA is also involved in HH nest monitoring with a range of partners. YDNPA's recent consultation report on the National Park Management Plan had included raptor persecution as a significant issue, and highlighted the potential negative impact on tourism in the area. Birds of prey can have a positive impact on the local tourist economy, such as the Peregrines at Malham Cove.

NERF (SD): It had been a good breeding season in the Pennines for some raptors. There has been an increase in barn owls, kestrels and Short Eared Owls. The Hen Harrier survey is being carried out every night. NERF's conference is due to take place later in November.

Welsh Government (KC): In comparison with previous years, so far in 2017 there is a decrease in the number of reported incidents received through WIIS. KC updated on the pesticide disposal scheme (an initiative of Welsh Water). Welsh Water is making an application to WG to roll the scheme out across all of Wales. KC will circulate further details.

**Action 9.5: KC to circulate data on the Welsh Water pesticide disposal scheme**

**10) AOB**

PD raised the issue of the Press release by North Yorks Police on 10th August relating to the Denton Marsh Harrier incident that occurred on 17th May. PD reiterated how extremely disappointing the actions of the individuals responsible were and condemned such activity. He was disappointed that the case had not been raised at the RPPDG meeting on 25th July as the case was then 11 weeks old. PD saw this as a missed opportunity for the group; CA and the other shooting organisations could have been party to the joint press release condemning the actions and supporting the appeal for information. CH asked MS to issue a reminder through NWCUC for police forces to share relevant cases with the group.

AA added that the group was not notified about the Bowland case that occurred in September 2016 and went to court in January. CH suggested that in future such cases should be flagged to the RPPDG through CH and the NWCUC for opportunity to comment. BE commented that ongoing live cases should not be shared nor commented on until the case was decided in court or proceedings completed.

**Action 9.6: MS to speak to Lorraine Elwood of Lancashire Police to put this in motion.**

CH noted that it was MS's last RPPDG meeting and thanked him for all his work with the group.

**Next meeting**

Next meeting to be February 2018 at RSPB offices, the Lodge, Sandy.

**Summary of actions on next page.**

**Summary of actions**

| Action     | Description  | Owner            |
|------------|--|------------------|
| Action 9.1 | <b>NE to circulate the Hen Harrier protocol</b>                                    | Ginny Swaile     |
| Action 9.2 | <b>All to provide comments to MS asap on the T's and C's</b>                       | All              |
| Action 9.3 | <b>RSPB and NWCU to review and sanitise the 2016 data for the maps.</b>            | Bob Elliot       |
| Action 9.4 | <b>MS to share the golden eagle recovery protocol with the group</b>               | Martin Sims      |
| Action 9.5 | <b>KC to circulate data on the Welsh Water pesticide disposal scheme</b>           | Kathleen Carroll |
| Action 9.6 | <b>MS to speak to Lorraine Elwood regarding future cases of raptor persecution</b> | Martin Sims      |