

Scarce Breeding Raptors in the Peak District 2014

Close monitoring of scarce breeding raptors in the Peak District is carried out by two groups: the South Peak Raptor Study Group (SPRSG) covers the South Peak, including the Upper Derwent Valley, the Staffordshire Moors, and south Derbyshire, whilst the Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group (PDRMG) covers the Dark Peak (excluding the Upper Derwent Valley), the Goyt Valley and the Macclesfield Forest. Both groups work within the Northern England Raptor Forum (NERF) and, since 2011, they have combined their Annual Reports in one "Peak District Raptor Report". The following is a summary of the key points contained in the report for 2014, whilst additional information can be found in the SBSG annual publication "Birds of the Sheffield Area", and on the PDRMG website at pdrmg.wordpress.com which also includes links to other organisations.

The Report began by noting that 2014 had seen an improvement in breeding success for some (but by no means all) raptor species, and also that the Peak District Birds of Prey Initiative had brought about a welcome improvement in relationships between raptor workers and shooting interests, for which they expressed their thanks to the staff concerned. [You can find more about the Peak District Birds of Prey Initiative on-line by using your favourite search engine.] It had also been a "good vole year" which had been of benefit for species such as Kestrel and Tawny Owl.

Hen Harriers have bred in the area in 1997 and 2006, and did so again in 2014. Of five young initially present, four fledged successfully with the fifth, a runt, thought to have perished in the nest; a second male was found dead close to the nest and was thought to have been killed by a mammalian predator. One of the females was fitted with a satellite tag, and was found dead in early September; a post-mortem showed she had succumbed to a severe nematode worm infestation. The remaining young, a male and female appeared to have fledged successfully. The report noted that the level of support shown by all interest groups had been unprecedented. Also noted was that this was one of only four successful breeding pairs in the whole of England, following a complete failure to produce any fledged young in England in 2013.

In the Upper Derwent Valley, **Goshawks** continued to be largely absent from traditional breeding sites, with only two sites occupied. Of these, one successfully fledged one chick, whilst the other failed and was later found to contain seven addled eggs. This was in stark contrast to elsewhere in the SPRSG area, where the species was very successful with 14 sites occupied, 12 being successful, and fledging at least 28 young (*cf.* a total of 18 fledged young in 2013, none of which were in the Upper Derwent Valley). In the PDRMG area, a number of single birds in suitable territories were checked throughout the year but no breeding was recorded until late in the breeding season, when two fledged young were found at one site.

Buzzards are now so widespread that it is no longer possible for SPRSG to monitor all known nests. However, it is known that unexplained failures continue to occur in the Upper Derwent Valley. There were two records of persecution, namely one bird caught in a fen trap near Winscar Reservoir in February, and one found shot near Glossop.

In 2014, **Peregrines** raised two young at Alport Castles, the first successful breeding there since 2007, but this was the only occupied site in the Upper Derwent Valley. Elsewhere in the SPRSG area, 15 sites were successful, raising at least 26 young. Of the 12 unsuccessful sites, most failed due to poor weather conditions, but young were apparently robbed from two sites and the police and RSPB were informed. In addition to these sites, pairs were successful at Derby cathedral and St. George's church in Sheffield, fledging three and four young respectively. The species continues to be under-represented in the PDRMG study area, and a number of historically successful sites remain unoccupied. Seven sites were occupied by pairs, but only one was successful, fledging two young.

Merlins had a very poor breeding season in the SPRSG area in 2014, with many sites unoccupied, or occupied only briefly. Only two sites successful, one in the Upper Derwent Valley which fledged five young, and one in the north Staffordshire moors which fledged four young, the first successful fledging there since 1999. The number of unoccupied sites is a cause for great concern. However, the PDRMG area fared very much better with 14 successful sites producing 57 fledged young; in addition, there were three monitored sites where breeding was not proven until post-fledging, and these three produced at least eleven young. However, there were also two sites where adult birds were interacting prior to breeding, but activity stopped before breeding, and all birds disappeared.

Hobbies continued to flourish in both study areas. In the SPRSG area, 34 sites were checked, at least 28 were successful, and fledged at least 57 young. PDRMG monitor two lowland sites, and both of these showed signs of increased populations. In total, these two sites produced at least 17 fledged young from nine nests.

In the SPRSG area, **Barn Owls** were successful at four sites, fledging in excess of seven young, and including a site in the Glossop area which was successful for the first time since the mid 1980s. In addition, a site in West Yorkshire, outside the Peak District, fledged five young.

Long-Eared Owls had an excellent breeding season in 2014, probably due to high vole numbers. In the SPRSG area, four pairs fledged at least six young (*cf.* one brood of two in 2013), whilst in the PDRMG area there were at least 17 nests fledging at least 20 young.

SPRSG located two pairs of **Short-eared Owl** in the Staffordshire moors but the outcomes from these were unknown, and two pairs in Upper Derwentdale, both of which were successful. The report expressed concern that the species is absent or scarce from several areas where it has traditionally bred. In the PDRMG area, the RSPB at Dove Stones Reservoir reported six breeding pairs, from which eight young were ringed from two nests. In general, however, the species proved difficult to monitor and the group were unable to confirm successful breeding, although young birds were recording post-fledging. The low numbers of fledged young continue to give cause for concern, particularly as 2014 was a good vole year.

Ravens continue to expand in the SPRSG area, including into the north-east lowland areas. In 2014 there were successful pairs in most White Peak quarry sites, and it is thought that there are now more pairs using tree nests than are using quarry sites. In Upper Derwentdale, a pair fledged four young at Alport Castles. PDRMG reported only four successful nests in the Dark Peak, only two of which were in their recording area, and again reiterated that this is considered to be serious under-representation.

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