

Press release: Hen Harrier Breeding Success

This year has proven the most successful Hen Harrier breeding season for a decade in England, with 34 chicks fledged across Lancashire, Cumbria, Northumberland and Derbyshire.

There were 14 nesting attempts of which nine were successful in producing chicks. This year's success can be put down to a variety of factors including: high numbers of voles, a key prey species, good weather and a great partnership effort.

Land managers have also been carrying out diversionary feeding offering supplementary food to the chicks since they have hatched. This technique ensures the best fledging rate and diverts the adult birds' attention from taking the chicks of other vulnerable ground nesting birds.

Unfortunately three nests failed due to predation and two due to a polygamous male struggling to provide two nests at once. Half of the attempts, four of which were successful, were on National Nature Reserves. While all other attempts and successful nests were on land managed for grouse shooting; one of these nests was just off the moorland on a hill farm in-by-land.

Andrew Sells, Chairman of Natural England, said:

The increase in hen harrier chicks this year is truly remarkable. These figures are a tribute to all those working hard for the survival of this breath-taking bird and show that responsible management of grouse moors must be part of the solution.

Reviving the fortunes of the hen harrier has been a cause close to my heart and I very much hope that we are now on the right path. But it will take more than one good breeding season to bring about a thriving population so it's important that there is no let-up in the efforts to conserve this magnificent bird.

Staff from Natural England, RSPB, Forestry Commission, the Moorland Association, United Utilities, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the National Trust, Northumberland National Park and Northumberland Wildlife Trust, individual Estates and their keepers, farmers, and a large number of volunteer raptor enthusiasts have worked in partnership to help ensure the future of these birds.

This partnership has helped liaise with estates, find and monitor nests, fit satellite tags and ensure that resources are available where and when we need them.

Gareth Cunningham, Head of Species Policy, RSPB said:

We welcome this increase in the number of successful nests this year and are proud to have played a direct role in the protection of seven out of the nine nests, through our EU-funded Hen Harrier LIFE project.

Whilst we acknowledge progress, this species' population is still at critically low levels and still vulnerable to illegal killing once birds disperse. We know that our English upland landscapes can support many more breeding pairs, indeed this is an international conservation obligation.

Dr Adam Smith of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust said:

It is very important that the hen harrier has bred more widely across England this year than it has for many years. We believe this is in large part because the multi-partner Hen Harrier Action Plan is now gaining traction.

That plan's practical approach is helping confidence build in the land management sector that birds of prey can be part of our cherished sporting moorland landscapes.

Amanda Anderson, Director of the Moorland Association said:

We are delighted to see this year a substantial improvement in the breeding success of hen harriers across upland England with grouse moors playing a key role in delivering enhanced fledging rates.

The Hen Harrier Action Plan has provided a blueprint that should deliver a sustainable and well-dispersed hen harrier population and unlock the predator-prey conflict to the benefit of both species.

A high proportion of this year's chicks have also been fitted with satellite tags, a large number of which have been funded through the RSPB's EU funded LIFE project and Natural England. We will continue to monitor the progress of these birds closely throughout the year.