

Hen Harrier Brood Management

In a few months' time the outcome of the 2019 Hen Harrier breeding season will be announced. Some people will claim that it has been a good year and others will trumpet the outcome as a great year for Hen Harriers in England. Neither of these claims will be true, nor will they accurately reflect the fact that whatever the number of fledglings actually is this year, the population will remain perilously low for years to come despite the fact that there is sufficient space for c 300 pairs in the northern uplands.

If brood management goes ahead as planned 2019 will not be remembered as a good year for the English Hen Harrier population. It will be remembered, by leading conservation groups, including NERF, and Raptor Workers across the country as the year that Natural England, the English Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation betrayed Hen Harriers to placate the grouse shooting industry. An industry that is, according to Natural England's own data, largely responsible for the unexplained demise of 72% of Hen Harriers satellite tagged by their own staff. With that knowledge it is not unreasonable to assume that a similar percentage of untagged birds '*disappeared*' under identical circumstances over the same period. It is also clear from press releases issued by RSPB that many of the birds satellite tagged as part of their Hen Harrier Life Project have also suffered the same fate on land managed for grouse shooting.

Natural England's answer to those facts is the implementation of their flawed policy of Hen Harrier brood management on the basis that it is essential for Hen Harrier conservation and will lead to an increase in the English population. That second assertion may be true during the breeding season but it totally ignores the fact that all of the evidence reveals that persecution is more problematic after the chicks disperse from their breeding grounds. Brood management will do nothing to prevent persecution despite claims to the contrary. Anyone who believes that the entire grouse shooting industry will wholeheartedly welcome an increase in the Hen Harrier population is at best delusional. There are members of the industry who won't even tolerate the small number of birds that already reside in, or transit through, the uplands at the present time let alone an increased number.

Following the confirmation that brood management has taken place this year NERF fully expects an announcement in due course from Natural England stating how many eggs, or chicks were taken in to the scheme, what the hatching rates were from each clutch, what the fledging rates were and confirmation that the birds were released back onto the moors from which they were removed. The project calls for all of the chicks to be satellite tagged prior to release back to the wild and for reasons of transparency NERF expects to read a prompt press release when the birds either die naturally or '*disappear*' in circumstances that suggest persecution was the probable cause. The press release should include the location of the last known fix from the satellite tag.

Whilst Natural England has the legal right to undertake brood management, because they licensed themselves to do it. However, there is no right way to do the wrong thing and there is, in NERF's opinion no justification for pursuing the brood management of Hen Harriers. We often hear the Police say that they cannot arrest their way out of the Hen Harrier persecution problem and in part that may be true. However, it is also true that Government policy should

not be influenced by individuals or organisations that rely on criminality for their industry to prosper.

Additionally we need to know how much of the significant cost of brood management is being borne, not by the industry which has created the problem through illegal persecution, but by the British tax payer.

Despite the hype that we can expect at the end of the breeding season, 2019 will not be a good year for Hen Harriers in England.

NERF

June 2019