

## Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project Summary

### Project description:

Running from 2014-2019, the Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project is an ambitious five-year programme of hen harrier conservation and the first truly cross-border, joint Scottish-English initiative for this species. Focusing on the North of England and Southern and Eastern Scotland, the project aims to draw together all the different strands of RSPB's work on hen harriers into a single, cohesive, interdisciplinary approach to their conservation. To this end, the project will combine practical on-the-ground protection, with investigations work, satellite tagging, ecological monitoring, science, policy, advocacy, and community engagement.

The LIFE+ Project will seek to add value to and build on the success of existing initiatives such as RSPB's Skydancer project in England, and other partnership work such as the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project, working together with a variety of organisations and community groups to establish an effective conservation network for hen harriers across the core project area.

### Objectives:

- To gain improved understanding of the movements of hen harriers in northern England and southern and eastern Scotland, and of the intensity and nature of persecution in this 'core project area', particularly outside the breeding season.
- To make use of this improved understanding to enhance the protection of hen harriers at both breeding and wintering sites in the core project area.
- To ensure as far as possible that habitat availability does not limit harrier recovery.
- To raise public awareness throughout the UK of hen harriers, the threats they face, and conservation efforts to overcome these.
- To encourage recognition by local communities and land managers of the hen harrier as an iconic species of upland landscapes, and thus increase support for its protection.

### Geographical area:

The project will focus on seven Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated for breeding hen harriers, two in England and five in Scotland. However, as hen harriers travel widely outside the breeding season, conservation actions will not be limited to these SPAs. These are:

Bowland Fells  
North Pennine Moors  
Glen Tanar  
Forest of Clunie  
Muirkirk and North Lowther Upland  
Langholm-Newcastleton Hills  
Glen App and Galloway Moors

### Project Actions:

#### *Satellite tagging*

A key part of the project will be the satellite tagging of as many hen harrier chicks as possible within the core project area. Given the very small breeding population in the core project area, tags may also be deployed in other areas as deemed appropriate, potentially including Northern Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, or the Isle of Man, working in conjunction with partners in these areas.

The information gained from these tags will be used for multiple benefits including:

- Identifying and monitoring important winter roost sites
- Identifying and monitoring potential breeding sites, including nest locations
- Identifying causes of hen harrier mortality and highlighting instances of persecution
- Facilitating better ecological understanding of hen harrier movements
- Facilitating community engagement by enabling people to follow the movements of individual harriers on the dedicated project website (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/henharrierlife/>)

As the safety of the birds is paramount, the project will take lessons from existing raptor satellite tagging projects which use this information for community engagement purposes. The public will only be able to follow a small subset of tagged individuals on the website, information on their locations will be subject to filtering and it will not be communicated in real time.

#### *Practical conservation & monitoring*

The project has funded two new full-time RSPB Assistant Investigations Officers to focus on hen harriers and the uplands, and is providing access to new, state-of-the-art technology for remote monitoring and protection. Using this and the information gained from satellite tagging, RSPB Investigations Officers are working closely with statutory bodies and police to ensure that any information collected is acted on appropriately.

The project is working closely with volunteers through the Northern England Raptor Forum (NERF) and Scottish Raptor Study Groups (SRSG) to coordinate comprehensive field searches for breeding attempts during the spring/summer, and roost sites during the winter.

- *Nest sites* – The project aims to monitor the number and success of all hen harrier breeding attempts within the core project area, and as many as possible outside this area. Wherever possible, nest sites are actively protected through either 24/7 monitoring with a rota of staff and volunteers, or remote, low-level measures, as deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis.
- *Winter roosts* – The project also aims to monitor the number of hen harriers using key winter roosts in the core project area, and the location of these sites. Wherever possible, key winter roost sites are also protected as above.

#### *Habitat management*

The project will ensure the provision and maintenance of good suitable hen harrier breeding habitat at key sites in the core project area. This will focus on two sites where RSPB already holds some influence over habitat management and where we have positive existing relations with the landowners – namely, the United Utilities Estate in Bowland and RSPB's Geltsdale reserve in Cumbria. In addition to this, the project will also seek opportunities to develop new positive working relationships with progressive landowners to improve habitat management for hen harriers on private land.

No active habitat management will be focused on winter roost sites, however the habitat quality of these sites will be carefully documented and all efforts made to protect these from any potentially damaging developments or changes in management practice.

### *Population monitoring*

Following on from the 2004 and 2010 UK-wide hen harrier breeding surveys, the LIFE+ Project will coordinate another UK-wide survey in 2016, enabling any recent population changes and trends to be identified.

### *Community Engagement*

In addition to practical measures, the project will also seek to raise awareness of hen harriers and promote their conservation across the core project areas through targeted media and community engagement work. In addition to the project website where people will be able to follow the stories of the tagged birds, awareness of hen harriers and the work of the project will be promoted through online social media and targeted press releases. Direct engagement will include outreach to schools (assemblies, workshops, field trips), community talks, and attendance at key community events and shows. It will also seek to build links with gamekeeping colleges, delivering hen harrier workshops to gamekeeping and countryside management students.

The LIFE project will be employing two a part-time Community Engagement Officers in 2016 to carry on this work and broaden it out into the core Scottish project areas, liaising closely with and adding value to existing engagement work such as the Making the Most of Moorlands Project at Langholm.

### *Community consultation*

In 2017, the project will fund a targeted community consultation to establish public attitudes and perceptions of hen harriers across the core project area. This will be designed to be directly comparable to a similar consultation which was carried out in Northern England as part of Phase 1 of the Skydancer project in 2010. This comparison will allow us to measure how much awareness and attitudes have changed, and will direct our future engagement work.

### *Stakeholder engagement*

On a local level, the project will seek to build links and work progressively with shooting and land-owning communities for the benefit of hen harriers. In particular, it will seek out other landowners willing to support hen harriers and will work in partnership with them to champion best practice.

### **For more information on the Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project, contact:**

Bea Ayling – Project Manager, Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project (maternity cover)

Tel. 0131 317 4167

Mob. 07525 618168

Email. [bea.ayling@rspb.org.uk](mailto:bea.ayling@rspb.org.uk)