



Media release

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Pioneering conservation project reveals new record number of golden eagles soaring in southern Scottish skies ahead of UK's only golden eagle festival

As part of a series of ground-breaking translocations to reverse the decline in numbers of golden eagles in the south of Scotland, the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has today (Thursday 8 September) revealed it successfully transported six more golden eagle chicks from the Scottish Highlands to a secret location in south Scotland this summer. The new additions bring the total population of golden eagles in the south to around 39 – more than tripling the population to the highest number recorded in the area for three centuries.

News of the translocation comes as the initiative was named a finalist for this year's National Lottery Awards Project of the Year for its "amazing conservation work" – a public vote, closing 9 October, will decide the winner.

The Project is now preparing to celebrate the new arrivals at the UK's only Golden Eagle Festival in Moffat. The festival, taking place between 16 and 18 September 2022, has been organised to help secure vital support for the charity's continued conservation efforts and celebrate the UK's first Eagle Town of Moffat. It will showcase the project's success and the ways in which people can help golden eagles to flourish in southern skies once again.

The Moffat Eagle Festival programme features a number of events and talks for all ages, many of which are free, including keynote speeches by wildlife cameraman and TV presenter Gordon Buchanan and renowned wildlife photographer Laurie Campbell, family fun workshops, an "Eagle Cliff" climbing wall and live music sessions.

Speaking about the news of the project's latest arrival and his involvement in the Festival, Gordon Buchanan said: "It's absolutely fantastic to hear that the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has successfully released six more golden eagles this summer, bringing the total population to the highest number recorded in the area for three centuries! This is truly groundbreaking.

"The perfect predators, golden eagles are heart-stoppingly exciting to watch, so I'm not surprised that eagle fever is spreading throughout the south of Scotland, as more than 15,000 volunteers and project participants have taken this iconic bird under these wings. It is great to see widespread support from landowners and estates, scouts, schools and other community groups. I'm delighted to support this project as part of the fantastic programme for this year's Moffat Eagle Festival."

Cat Barlow, Project Manager for the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, which was awarded the prestigious Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Tony Bradshaw Award for Outstanding Best Practice earlier this year, added: “It is thrilling to know that our six new arrivals bring the local population of golden eagles to the highest number recorded in the area for three centuries. As a top predator, this majestic bird of prey is fundamental to protecting our local eco system. Before our project began, only three pairs were nesting in the south of Scotland. We’ve now more than tripled the population, and though all seem to have settled in the south of Scotland, some of our birds have even travelled as far south as The Forest of Bowland in Lancashire, where the species has been extinct for a number of years.

“Our work has only been possible due to the support of National Lottery Heritage Fund, our project staff and partners, NatureScot licensing team, raptor specialists, Advisory Panel members, estates, CalMac Ferries, Visit Moffat, Moffat Eagle Festival revellers and of course the wider community in the south of Scotland. We would also like to thank all those who take the time to vote for us for the National Lottery Award Project of the Year – the £5,000 prize money could help us make an even greater difference.”

Francesca Osowska, NatureScot’s Chief Executive and a passionate supporter of the Project, said: “The key aim of this exciting project is to increase the number of breeding pairs in the south of Scotland, a vital part of our work to reverse biodiversity loss and combat the climate emergency. With wildlife declining across the globe, it is fantastic to hear that the project has translocated so many eagle chicks once again this year. Golden eagles are an exciting part of Scotland’s wildlife, and we’re passionate about returning them to places where they used to thrive.

“This is brilliant partnership working, and a great support for the local green economy. Already, we are seeing great success. The project’s many accolades really are very well deserved and we hope lots of people vote for them to win the National Lottery Awards Project of the Year.”

Earlier this year, led by the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, Scottish Raptor Study Group workers in the Scottish Highlands, carefully collected chicks from a number of supportive estates (including RSPB Abernethy and Rottal Estate Angus Glens) under license from NatureScot before taking them to the release site in a confidential location in the Moffat Hills. The birds were then cared for in specially-designed release aviaries and supplementary fed to help them adjust to their new habitat before their release this summer. Experts at the University of Edinburgh’s Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies also provided considerable support throughout the process to monitor the health and wellbeing of the birds.

Caroline Clark, Director for Scotland at The National Lottery Heritage Fund said: “This translocation of six eagle chicks is fantastic news for the biodiversity of the South of Scotland, and for the country as a whole. It is because of groundbreaking achievements like this, and the project’s impressive partnership working and engagement with the local

community, that the project has been shortlisted for The National Lottery Awards Project of the Year, which is now open to the public vote.

“Through our conversations with National Lottery players, we know that nature is incredibly important to them. The £1.5m funding given to the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project means they can help protect Scotland’s outstanding wildlife and landscapes.”

The six new arrivals have been named by a range of individuals, school children, organisations and supporters of the Moffat Eagle Festival including the Buccleuch Arms Hotel in Moffat, and the project’s lead charity partner, The Southern Uplands Partnership, who named one bird Merrick after the highest peak in the area.

South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) received 300 entries from children and young people throughout southern Scotland in a competition to name one of the birds. The winner was two-year-old Zara Blackburn from Kelso, who suggested the name 'Sula'.

Announcing the winner, Tracey Graham, SOSE’s Head of Marketing and Communications said: "SOSE is a supporter of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, so we were delighted to be asked to name one of the chicks that were released during the summer.

"As part of our plans to engage with the people of the South of Scotland, we thought this was a great opportunity to ask our local communities to help us and we got a fantastic response to our naming competition we held at Border Union and the Dumfries shows we attended during the summer. We look forward to hearing Sula progress and well done to Zara!"

Project partners the Southern Uplands Partnership, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Forestry and NatureScot worked on the project together for more than 11 years before releasing the first eagle chicks in 2018. Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, project partners and the Scottish Government, the initiative is a key project under *‘Scotland’s Biodiversity. A Route Map to 2020’*, supporting the Government’s *‘2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity’*.

For the latest project and festival news, or to donate to the charity initiative, visit: www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk

To vote for South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project to win the National Lottery Awards Project of the Year go to lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/awards, use the hashtag **#NLGoldenEagle** on Twitter and Instagram, and/or visit @lotterygoodcauses on Facebook and add the hashtag to the pinned post. Voting runs from 9am on 7 September until 5pm on 7th October. Each person can vote once on each platform (a total of four votes).

Ends

Notes to Editors

About the South of Scotland Golden Eagles Project

- Before the project began, there was only between two and four pairs of golden eagles across Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, however a supporting study by NatureScot shows that the local habitat is suitable for up to 16 pairs.
- Earlier this year, the project was awarded the prestigious Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Tony Bradshaw Award for Outstanding Best Practice.
- Since 2018, the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has successfully translocated:
 - 18 golden eagles juveniles collected at around 6- 8 weeks of age from the Scottish Highlands to the south of Scotland.
 - 7 sub adult golden eagles (aged between 6 months and 3 years)
- In winter 2021/22, the project became the first in the UK to successfully translocate free-flying young golden eagles (aged between 6 months and 3 years) to boost a low population of this iconic bird.
- The birds have now all settled into their new habitats and are fending for themselves.
- During the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, Beaky was the first of the project's eagles to venture south of the border and visit the North Pennines area, where there have been no breeding pairs of eagles for many years. She was also later seen demonstrating potential courtship behaviour with Skan, one of the male eagles translocated to the area by the project.
- The project has identified that the best way of enhancing this fragmented and vulnerable population of golden eagles is through increasing the supply of young eagles, which will eventually recruit into the breeding population.
- Recent satellite tagging work of golden eagles in Scotland has shown that the south of Scotland golden eagle population is greatly isolated from larger populations of this species from the Highlands.
- For the next two years, the Project will continue to translocate juvenile and subadult golden eagles under the conditions of the novel research licence.
- For the translocations featured in this news story, the project team:
 - Used tried and tested methods for rear and release of the young golden eagles derived from previous white-tailed eagle and red kite reintroduction projects, and through the cooperation of raptor experts and estates.
 - collected single eagle chicks from broods of young in the Highlands and raised and released them in an undisclosed location in the southern uplands.
 - focussed on ensuring former and potential nesting sites are re-occupied; to identify any additional habitat management measures that will bring further improvements in food supplies in these areas; and wider work with local communities, schools, and enterprises to bring much wider benefits.
- Each released golden eagle is satellite tagged by licensed individuals to ensure the project team builds up as much information as they can on the ranging behaviour, survival, and health of the birds.
- Project staff work a variety of expert advisers, including specialists from the Edinburgh University Dick Vet School, and from Ireland and Spain who have been heavily involved in successful raptor reintroduction programmes.
- Over 15,000 volunteers and special project participants of all ages (aged 4 to 92) have taken the golden eagles under their wings, as they've supported the project through a wide range of tasks and initiatives.
- In September 2021, the project worked with Visit Moffat to host the UK's first ever golden eagle festival to celebrate the town of Moffat becoming the country's first official Eagle Town. The programme included a keynote speech from Gordon Buchanan.
- In May 2021, the project opened the UK mainland's first ever golden eagle information point. Designed by award-winning exhibition designers Studioarc, in partnership with the project

team, the new Eyrie: Eagle Information Point is located in the new Waterwheel Tearoom in Philiphaugh Estate, near Selkirk.

- Those who have participated in the initiative to date come from a range of backgrounds and organisations, including: the UK's first ever Golden Eagle Scout Champions at the Scottish Borders Scouts; over 360 pupils from primary schools across the south of Scotland and one in the Scottish Highlands; Borders College; the Scottish Raptor Study Group; Kielder Bird of Prey Centre; HMP Dumfries; and local businesses like Wild Tree Adventures.
- The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project is:
 - supported by Scottish Land & Estates, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Forestry, NatureScot, and The Southern Uplands Partnership.
 - funded by:
 - £1.5 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund;
 - the Scottish Government; and
 - Scottish Power Renewables.
 - licenced to undertake the work by NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage).
- The project also previously received more than £150,000 match funding from the Scottish Government and the European Union – LEADER 2014-2020 programme.
- The Project's Scientific Advisory Panel provides the project with expert scientific, veterinary and technical advice (particularly to ensure eagle health and welfare). Members also advise on wider specific scientific and land management/land use issues. Members include:
 - Dr Neil Anderson (Chair), The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh
 - Dr Rob Ogden (Deputy Chair), The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and The Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh, and SNH Scientific Expert panel
 - Dave Anderson, Scottish Raptor Study Group
 - Roy Dennis MBE, Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation
 - Professor Miguel Ferrer, Spanish National Research Council
 - Dr Alan Fielding, SNH Scientific Expert Panel
 - Dr Gidona Goodman, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh
 - Professor Anna Meredith FRCVS, University of Melbourne Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, Australia
 - Stephen Murphy, Natural England
 - Professor Ian Newton OBE FRS FRSE
 - Lorcan O'Toole, Golden Eagle Trust Ireland
 - Professor Chris Quine, Forest Research
 - Chris Rollie, RSPB and Scottish Raptor Study Group
 - Dr Ewan Weston, Scottish Raptor Study Group
 - Dr Phil Whitfield, Natural Research
 - Ray Lowden, Falconer, Kielder Bird Of Prey Centre
 - Dougie McKenna, Senior Ecologist and Falconer, Stones Wildlife Management
 - Robin Reid, Scottish Raptor Study Group
- Using money raised by the National Lottery, The National Lottery Heritage Fund **inspires, leads and resources** the UK's heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future. www.HeritageFund.org.uk.
- Follow @HeritageFundUK on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund

About the National Lottery Awards

- The National Lottery Awards 2022 are an annual search to find the UK's favourite Lottery-funded projects. The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project is through to the finals of The

National Lottery Awards 2022, competing against 16 other projects from across the UK to be named National Lottery Project of the Year. The winner, as voted for by the public, will receive a £5,000 cash prize. People can vote by visiting www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/awards before 5pm on 7 October.

- All voting will be independently adjudicated and verified.
- To find out more about the positive impact playing The National Lottery has had in your area, please visit www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk
- The National Lottery Awards celebrate projects that are “doing extraordinary things with National Lottery funding”.

