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First ever Eagle Schools initiative raises young conservationists



The groundbreaking South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has launched what is believed to be the UK's first ever Eagle Schools initiative to help safeguard the future for Golden Eagles in Scotland.

Sixteen Primary Schools in the south of Scotland and the Highlands are among the first to take part in the new initiative, which gives pupils the opportunity to learn first hand from experts working with the Golden Eagles about this iconic species and its importance to the natural environment.

Since the launch of the new scheme 324 pupils have had the opportunity to take part in a range of fun and inspiring activities, which reflect the Curriculum for Excellence and take an innovative approach to individual learning. Some even got to meet a Golden Eagle. The project is also now facilitating links between Eagle Schools in the south of Scotland and those in the north to provide exciting opportunities that are beneficial to both schools.

Speaking on the launch of the initiative Rick Taylor, Community Outreach Officer for the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project said: "Earlier this year we transported three Golden Eagles chicks from the Scottish Highlands to a secret location in the Southern Uplands of Scotland. It is thrilling to see these young birds now thriving in their new habitats and fending for themselves.

"Significant community support, including support from local schools, played a vital role in this early success. We need to keep building on this so that we can ensure that we can see even more of these magnificent birds across the south of Scotland's skies. We are absolutely delighted to see the passion and enthusiasm from pupils at our first Eagle Schools in the Borders and the Highlands. It certainly gives us great hope for the future. Their involvement and continued enthusiasm will truly help to protect iconic species like Golden Eagles for generations to come."

Speaking of their involvement Principal Teacher for Yarrow & Kirkhope Primary Schools, Mrs Hoppé said: “We were really excited to be one of the first schools to take part in the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project’s Eagle Schools initiative. It really brought our community together and I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone. The children have had the most amazing experience. We are incredibly proud of the interest our pupils have shown in protecting this majestic and important bird. We look forward to support the project to make sure that Golden Eagles flourish in the south of Scotland.”

The Eagle School Program culminates in 'Eagle Day'. On this day the school opens its doors to families and local people with students sharing their learning and achievements with their community. The event includes an exhibition of work and a presentation ceremony, where students receive individual certificates. The day ends in a visit from a real, falconry Golden Eagle.

Callum, a pupil Kirkhope Primary School who was presented with an Eagle Schools’ certificate for his involvement in the project said: “I really liked meeting all the birds of prey that were brought from the falconry centre. It was amazing to hear about how they hunt.”

Classmate Josh added: “I loved learning about the Eagles: they were fascinating and now I know more about them I have a greater interest and want to learn more.”

Francesca Osowska, Scottish Natural Heritage’s Chief Executive, said: “It’s wonderful that children are having the chance to see and learn about these amazing birds. I remember how fantastic it was the first time I saw a golden eagle. The more people who can experience this, the better – and the Eagle Schools will help to make that happen. We’re passionate about returning golden eagles to places where they were once an important part of our wildlife, so they can help Scotland’s nature thrive.”

The pioneering South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has been set up to address low numbers of Golden Eagles in the South of Scotland. Project partners RSPB Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Southern Uplands Partnership, have been working together for more than eleven years to bring it to fruition. Funded by The National Lottery, project partners, the Scottish Government and local LEADER Programmes, the initiative is a key project under the Scottish Government’s 2020 Challenge for Scottish Biodiversity (which sets out a route map to protect and restore Scotland’s biodiversity).

For more information and the latest news on the Eagle Schools visit:

www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk

Ends

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Notes to Editors

About the South of Scotland Golden Eagles Project

- In the first of a series of groundbreaking translocations, conservationists at the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project successfully transported three Golden Eagle chicks (named Edward, Beaky and Emily) from the Scottish Highlands to a secret location in the Southern Uplands of Scotland in August 2018.
- The young birds have settled into their new homes and are now beginning to fend for themselves.
- The £1.3 million project, hosted by the Southern Uplands Partnership, is now calling on volunteers across the south of Scotland (locals and visitors alike) to support project staff and Scottish Raptor Study Group members in monitoring and recording sightings of the birds.
- Children and young people in schools across the South of Scotland adopted the birds, naming them Edward, Beaky and Emily.
- Currently there are only between two and four pairs of Golden Eagle across Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, however a supporting study by Scottish Natural Heritage shows that the local habitat is suitable for up to 16 pairs.
- The project has also 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 four years, the Project will bring between three and ten young eagles south.
- The project team is using 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.
- The project team has collected single eagle chicks from broods of two young in the Highlands and raised and released them in an undisclosed location in the Moffat Hills area.
- Work is focussing 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 has been satellite tagged 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 are working with 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.
- The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project is:
 - supported by Scottish Land & Estates, RSPB Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Southern Uplands Partnership.
 - funded by:
 - £1.37 million from The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund;
 - the Scottish Government;
 - more than £150,000 match funding from Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders LEADER programmes .
 - licenced to undertake the work by Scottish Natural Heritage.
- The [Scottish Raptor Study Group](#) are supplying considerable expertise of golden eagle conservation to the project.
- Thanks to National Lottery players, the Heritage Lottery Fund invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife.

About Eagle Schools

- The Eagle School program aims to educate and engage school students and local communities with their newly arrived Eagles.
- Initially focusing on Primary Schools across the South, students will explore Eagle ecology, their place in history and culture and learn how to identify Eagles from other birds of prey in their area. Through an array of cross-curricular activities, students will not only gain a knowledge of Golden Eagles but will consider their relationship with the natural world and formulate their own opinions on their place within it.
- With strong links to the Curriculum for Excellence and an innovative approach to individual learning, the Eagle Schools Program engages students in a wide variety of ways.
- With indoor and outdoor sessions, research projects and practical learning, the program aims to include all interests and abilities and has the flexibility to be tailored to individual schools and their specific requirements.
- Schools are now being offered the chance to establish links between schools in the South with those in the North of Scotland. While the initial focus will be on the Eagles, the potential for exciting engagement opportunities across the curriculum is extremely beneficial to both schools.
- The Eagle School Program culminates in 'Eagle Day'. On this day the school opens its doors to families and local people with students sharing their learning and achievements with their home community. The event usually includes an exhibition of work and a presentation ceremony, where students will receive individual certificates and the school will receive a piece of Eagle themed artwork and an official Eagle School plaque. The day ends in a visit from a real, falconry Golden Eagle.
- With indoor and outdoor sessions, research projects and practical learning, the program aims to include all interests and abilities and has the flexibility to be tailored to individual schools and their specific requirements.
- [Name schools that have taken part].

