

Media release



South Scotland Golden Eagle population reaches new heights thanks to novel research technique



The pioneering South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has become 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. These new additions bring the total number of golden eagles in the south of Scotland to around 33 – the highest number recorded here in the last three centuries.

Taking a new research approach, under licence from NatureScot, the team leading the groundbreaking charity project revealed today that they had successfully caught, transported and released seven golden eagles from the Outer Hebrides. The Outer Hebrides were selected as the source to boost the south of Scotland population because these Islands host one of the highest densities of golden eagles in Europe. The birds were released almost immediately on arrival in a secret location in the southern uplands of Scotland.

The project team is continuing to monitor the birds' progress to see if they settle and breed in the area. If they do, this could be a groundbreaking for the project.

Throughout the process, the project team followed NatureScot's strict novel-research guidelines which were assessed by Scotland's Nature Agency against the [Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations](#). Only a small number of projects have used this technique. If successful it could be used further to support wider raptor conservation programmes.

The team has previously (from 2018 to 2021) successfully released 12 young eagles collected as chicks from nests in the Highlands and Islands. This is a process that is much more widely used for raptor conservation programmes. The released eagles have all settled in south of Scotland, with frequent sightings of interactions including with other native eagles.

Explaining the significance of the most recent translocation, Dr Cat Barlow, Project Manager for the Project said: "This new novel-research licence has provided a significant boost in our efforts to ensure golden eagles truly flourish in southern skies. Though it is still early days,

this is the first in the UK to trial this approach as part of raptor reinforcement. This could be a groundbreaking technique for the global conservation management of golden eagles and other raptors. We will continue to monitor these birds to see if they settle, thrive and breed in the south of Scotland, which will be the real measure of success.

“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 and of course the community in the south of Scotland. We’re incredibly grateful to them all.”

Scotland’s Environment Minister Mairi McAllan MSP added: “The success of this project can be traced back to 2007 - golden eagles faced extinction from southern Scotland for a number of different reasons and the Scottish Government made a commitment to achieve positive change.

“Thanks to the close partnership working between conservationists and land managers in the south of Scotland, the financial support from sponsors and the world-leading techniques employed by the project, there are now more golden eagles in southern Scotland than there has been for hundreds of years, with birds even being seen in northern England.

“Scotland was one of the first countries to recognise the twin crises of nature loss and climate change, and this project shows what we can achieve with determined efforts to restore our lost biodiversity.”

Francesca Osowska, NatureScot’s Chief Executive, said: “This ground-breaking project has accomplished so much over just a few years, bringing a viable population of golden eagles back to south Scotland and inspiring other similar initiatives around the world. Particularly during the twin crises of climate emergency and biodiversity loss, it’s wonderful to see a success like this.

“Golden eagles are a vital 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.”

In the past, the Project has focused on collecting much younger chicks (aged 6 to 8 weeks) directly from nest sites with twins, but the team has struggled to source a sufficient number of birds, particularly when Covid-19 restrictions were in place. After thorough research and consultation over welfare and ecological issues with an expert Scientific Advisory Panel, the Project identified a new research-based approach involving catching and moving free-flying young golden eagles from a naturally densely populated area. At every stage, the welfare of the birds has been paramount.

An experienced team of expert raptor ecologists, Dave Anderson and Robin Reid, and Scottish Raptor Study Group member Graeme Anderson carefully caught the young (sub-adult) birds at bait sites in the Outer Hebrides. The team was careful not to select adult or breeding birds, and aged the birds based on their plumages. Five females and two males were housed in specially designed travel boxes and quickly transported by road and sea to

the south of Scotland. The birds were satellite tagged by licensed individuals and swiftly released.

Caroline Clark, Director for Scotland, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, who have provided key funding for this work, said: "This translocation of seven eagle subadults is fantastic news for the biodiversity of the South of Scotland, and for the world as a whole. It is great to see the partnership successfully working, and the way communities across the South of Scotland have embraced and supported the new arrivals.

"Thanks to National Lottery players, the £1.5m funding we have provided to the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project means they can play their part in protecting Scotland's outstanding wildlife and landscapes."

The seven new arrivals have been named by a range of individuals, school children and organisations. Sir E Scott School on Harris in the Outer Hebrides, where the eagles came from, named their eagle *Rowan* - the project is forging links between the school and Sciennes Primary School in Edinburgh.

Project partners RSPB Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Forestry, NatureScot and the Southern Uplands Partnership, had 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

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.
- Since 2018, the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has successfully translocated:
 - 12 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)
- The first 12 birds have settled into their new habitats and are fending for themselves.
- Covid-19 restrictions prevented the charity from translocating eagle chicks in 2020.
- 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 to -three years, the Project will continue to translocate juvenile and subadult golden eagles under the conditions of the novel research licence.
- For the first translocations, 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.
- In 2019, the project revealed that over 10,000 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 through the Heritage Lottery 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
- 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 the National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we **inspire, lead and resource** the UK's heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future. www.HeritageFund.org.uk.

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